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ABSTRACT

The issue of youth homelessness in Australia is examined in the context of relevant social and educational policies. The exploration is based on 8 years of research into the situation of homeless youth in Australia involving several studies, including a study of school students in 9 communities and field visits to 100 schools. In 1994, researchers found 11,000 homeless students in Australian schools. Part 1 describes the dimensions of the problem in Australia and concludes that youth homelessness is getting worse in Australia, although perhaps not at the rate at which it increased in the early 1990s. Part 2 explores early intervention and prevention and calls for a national approach to set policies that address the problems of homeless youth and their families. (Contains 39 tables, 3 figures, and 138 references.) (SLD)

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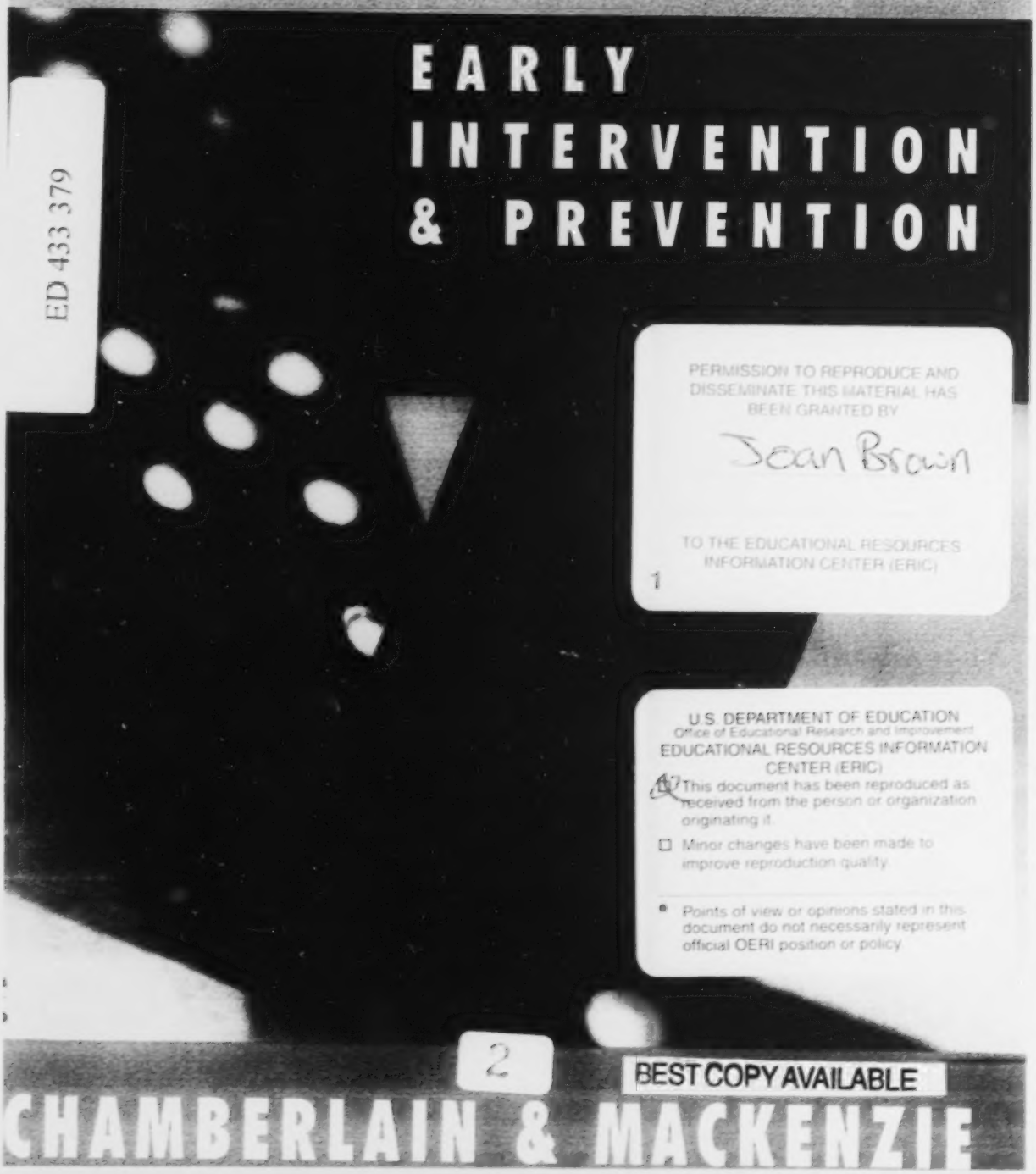

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CHAMBERLAIN & MACKENZIE

YOUTH
Homelessness

EARLY
INTERVENTION
& PREVENTION

For Voula and Shizuki

YOUTH Homelessness

EARLY INTERVENTION & PREVENTION

CHRIS CHAMBERLAIN
DAVID MACKENZIE

Australian Centre for Equity through Education

SYDNEY

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FOREWORD

This book by Chris Chamberlain and David MacKenzie is timely and significant. Their considerable contribution over many years has informed our understanding of youth homelessness in Australia, through published research and by regular participation in community consultations and public debate. This places them in a unique position to educate and influence field workers, policy makers and the broader community.

My involvement with the Prime Minister's Youth Homeless Taskforce has made me acutely aware of parents' need for information about the pressures and demands of today's world on their children. Many parents across Australia are genuinely confused and distressed about issues such as youth suicide, high levels of youth unemployment, a highly competitive educational system, and media presentations of rising youth homelessness. There is a growing sense of frustration and helplessness, often exacerbated by financial pressures, which adds to the tensions and complexity of family life in the 1990's.

The situation for young people is even more confusing. They observe friends and family members unable to find work or a secure place in society, irrespective of their educational achievements or job search activity. The transitions for young people from support in families to independence, is problematic for many and unachievable for some. This is the reality of life for thousands of young people and their families.

For young people whose family life has been a nightmare of abuse or continual conflict, their prospects are even more severely prescribed. From dangerous homes, through periods in

alternative care, many end up living destitute on the streets of our cities. Our understanding of their experience has been trivialised by media stereotypes and shallow dramatisations of the world of 'street kids'.

It is a cliché to say we live in a society which is changing rapidly. As a community we need to reflect on how friendly and supportive is the world we are creating for our young people. We need to let go of simplistic explanations of social phenomena such as youth homelessness, which inevitably blame young people or their families for the problem. One of the main messages in this book is the need for a national approach - policies which will prevent the problem of youth homelessness worsening, assist homeless young people and their families to rebuild their lives, and ensure appropriate and sustainable pathways to participation in the community for all young Australians.

The discussion of a 'national policy challenge' in Chapter 11 is particularly relevant. The variability in standards of care systems across Australia for young people who are without adequate family or community supports is nothing short of a national disgrace. Service delivery and assistance for young people and their families must be coordinated and located in the most useful and accessible settings, including schools, youth and family support agencies, crisis centres and other local community contact points.

Commonwealth, State and Territory governments must coordinate a national response for what is clearly a national problem. The hard work needs to be done to bring about a continuum of services ranging from effective prevention and early intervention through to the provision of affordable housing and community networks which support independent living.

Throughout this book, there is a clarity of thought and rigorous analysis which contextualises the problem of 'youth homelessness' in the social changes of the past thirty years, and shows

how the problem will continue well into the 21st century unless we act now. There is a wealth of information on the problem of youth homelessness. The book not only graphically describes the experience of homelessness for young people, but offers practical policy solutions which should be considered for implementation. Chris Chamberlain and David MacKenzie have a real commitment to young people who are homeless, and this is evident throughout their book. However, this does not distort their vision nor affect their careful analysis of the data. Finally, we should be reminded that each one of us has a responsibility to ensure that every young person is able to participate fully in the benefits of the Australian community. In that sense, the problem is ours as well.

David Eldridge *(Salvation Army)*
Chairperson, Prime Minister's Youth Homeless Taskforce
Chair of the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness

PREFACE

This book is the result of a research journey which has taken eight years. Over that time we have accumulated debts to many individuals and agencies, who made it possible for us to continue learning. The list is long because so many people enthusiastically helped us with the project. First of all, we want to acknowledge the homeless young people whom we met along the way. We thank them for their courage and their honesty. They gave us a great deal of their time, and we gave them little in return. In one sense, this book is 'for them', although it is hardly an adequate recompense.

The research began in 1990 when we were asked to carry out an evaluation of an information and referral service for homeless young people known as the Information Deli, which had recently opened in central Melbourne. The service was to provide support to 'street kids', and it dealt with many young people who were chronically disadvantaged.

The research started as a group project for graduate students completing an MA in Applied Social Research at Monash University. We should like to thank Hayden Brown, Sue Conwell, Patricia Farnes, Doug Lorman and Hui Sze Wong who contributed to the data collection in the first year. Claudia Hirst was the chairperson of the Evaluation Committee, and she provided supportive leadership, often giving us wise advise. Robyn Hartley contributed her considerable research experience as a member of the Committee. Elizabeth Cham was another member of the Committee who has maintained her commitment to young people over many years. Jenny Lincoln carried out the difficult

task of chairing the Project Management Committee, as well as being a member of the Evaluation Committee. We owe special thanks to the coordinator, Maggie Laurie, and to Dawn Taylor, Belinda Schmidtke, Phil Patterson and other staff who tolerated our frequent presence in their workplace, and shared their thoughts and feelings with us in an extraordinarily open way.

The first year of the project raised many questions and we decided to continue the research for another 12 months. At this time, we also began collecting information at an agency in suburban Melbourne which dealt with homeless teenagers. Our thanks to Georgina Ryder and Tim Baxter who worked at that service. We also thank the graduate students who worked on the project in 1991: Jenny Adam, Richard Hill, Stephen Mackay, Mitra Malekzadeh, Glen O'Grady, Katrin Ogilvy and Belinda Robson. The research at the suburban agency alerted us to the possibility that there might be school students in the homeless population and in 1993 we carried out a pilot study in 120 Victorian secondary schools. It revealed many more homeless students than we expected, and this was the impetus for a national census of homeless school students in 1994.

Seed funding for the national census was provided by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), lead by Professor Mike Berry from RMIT and Professor Chris Maher from Monash University. Chris Maher's untimely death in 1997 was particularly sad. Chris gave us a great deal of support and encouragement when we were planning the national census in 1994, and he organised for us to carry out the project at AHURI.

To raise funds for the census, we took the proposal to several Commonwealth departments. The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) unit in the Commonwealth Department of Housing and Regional Development provided half the money and the balance was made up by the Victorian

Department of Health and Community Services. Ms Christine Goonery from the Commonwealth and Mr Mike Debinsky from Victoria saw the value of the proposed research and found the resources to make it happen.

Malcom Rosier compiled the data base of all government and Catholic secondary schools across the country. Kathy Desmond, Ray Patterson, Jennifer Taylor and Mandy Charman worked on the census with us. They did an outstanding job and we could not have managed without them. Ninety-nine per cent of secondary schools across the country took part in the census, and we thank all the people in schools who made it work so well.

The next research was a study of school students in nine communities in 1996. The purpose was to investigate the size of the 'at risk' population and to identify the characteristics of young people who might be at risk, and to identify policies and practices that enable early intervention. This was funded by two bodies. The Victorian Department of Human Services wanted a focus on early intervention in Victoria. The Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) provided funding through the Australian Centre for Equity through Education (ACEE) for a national approach, including extensive fieldwork in schools and communities across Australia. This joint funding enabled us to carry out a much larger study than is normally possible. The final sample was 42,000. We thank DEETYA, the Victorian Department of Human Services and the ACEE for their support.

Following the census in 1994, we made field visits to 100 schools in states and territories across the country. In 1996, we began another extensive period of fieldwork, visiting many schools and agencies in every state. This field knowledge underpins much of what we say about policy and practice in Part 2. We are indebted to the youth and community workers, teachers and government officials who took time to help us, and made us

welcome during our visits.

We cannot acknowledge everyone because the list is so long, but we would like to mention some of the projects across the country where we have had special help. In Victoria, we thank Kathy Desmond, Max Lee and Kathy O'Donnell at the KITS project in the North-Eastern suburbs of Melbourne. The late Deb Kearsey, perhaps the most influential initiator of KITS in its earliest days, was a skilful community leader who would always defer to the role of the community. We also thank Vivienne Archdall from the Westpac Project, who has given us lots of good advice. She is a well known advocate for the educational policies discussed in this book. Jan Osmotherly, Debra Dinning and Jane Archbold have been at the forefront of pioneering 'early intervention' initiatives in Wangaratta and surrounding towns. Their project, *Country Connections*, deserves much better government support than it has received.

Others who have helped us in Victoria include Noyemzar Tasci, Colleen Noonan and Ian Hirst in Ballarat; and Viv Sercombe from Maribyrnong Secondary College. Thanks also to Gary Embry and his colleagues at Upper Yarra Secondary College where some excellent initiatives are being tried. The staff at Brunswick Secondary College have allowed us to pilot a number of projects at the school - their indulgence is greatly appreciated. We received help from Karen Fyfe and Karen Lechte at Westall Secondary College. Thanks also to Maxine Foster, Annette Ford and the welfare team at Eumemmerring Secondary College.

We thank Liz Sweeney, David Jones and Julie Irvine who took up the issue of homelessness in the South Coast region of New South Wales. Their excellent work deserves high praise and wider recognition. Helen Hurley, the Principal of Sarah Redfern High School in Sydney's West provided us with many insights, and is an articulate advocate for early intervention.

Hayden Sargent has been one of the pioneers of early

intervention in Queensland, and his 'Partnership Project' in two high schools and three primary schools deserves special note. Our thanks to Janet Bestmann who worked on the Partnership Project at Caboolture High School, to Narelle McDonald at Rochedale High, and to Heather Mansfield at the primary school cluster. Terry Morgan and Helen Ferguson of the Office of Youth Affairs in Queensland have been at the forefront of early intervention initiatives in their state. We thank them for allowing us to keep in contact with these developments, and for funding our visits to Queensland on a number of occasions. Thanks also to Bruce Muirhead from the Department of Education.

We worked closely with a number of schools in Tasmania. Judy Hebblethwaite, Director of the Office of Youth Affairs, and Leigh Taylor in the Department of Education and the Arts have given strong official support to initiatives in that state. We gratefully acknowledge the help we have had from Mara Schneiders and Harry Kent (Launceston College), Chris Binks (the Don College, Devonport), Jerry Skulan (Hellyer College, Burnie), and Helen Barrett (Claremont College, Hobart). Many people are working very hard on these issues in Tasmania, and we thank them all.

In South Australia, we benefited from discussions with Pat Thomson, the Principal of Paralowie High School, a full-service school before the term was ever thought of. Thanks also to Peter Turner, Principal of Salisbury High School, and to Glenys Munro and Jim Oakey of Paralowie House. Glenys and Jim are trying some innovative initiatives with homeless young people. Thanks also to Dr Rodney Fopp at the University of South Australia. He is a good colleague and a valued friend.

People from many organisations have been a constant source of good advice and assistance. We would particularly like to mention Netty Horton, Paul McDonald and Peter Tierney from the Council to Homeless Persons; Carol Russell and Janet Murphy

from the Children's Welfare Association of Victoria; Mark Longmuir, Carmel Guerra and all the staff at the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria; Linda Frow from the New South Wales Council of Social Services; Kym Davy from the Youth Affairs Council of South Australia; and Stephen Ward from Grassmere Youth Services in Melbourne's outer East.

Lena Sudano and Gill Tasker from the Brotherhood of St Laurence have helped us on many occasions; Jon Smith, the Director of Ozanam House has been a friend and a source of good advice; David Eldridge and Tony Newman from the Salvation Army have both helped us in countless ways. David's major contribution to youth issues is well known. Narelle Clay, the CEO of Wollongong Youth Accommodation Association is an outstanding advocate for young people and has been a good friend; as has Alex McDonald who pioneered streetwork to reach homeless teenagers in Melbourne. A special mention should also be made of Kathy Hilton and her team at the Ardoch Youth Foundation. Kathy was one of the pioneers of school based support for young people, long before the idea became fashionable.

We have also had a lot of support from people in Commonwealth and State Departments across the country, and a range of other official bodies. The list is too long to name everyone, but there are some people who must be mentioned. Members of the SAAP unit in the Department of Health and Family Services have responded uncomplainingly to many requests over the years. The helpfulness of Doug Limbrick and his team is much appreciated. Glen Foard and Angela Merlo at the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in Canberra have helped us on many occasions. Several times we pressed them for an urgent analysis of SAAP data at short notice. They never let us down.

Quentin Buckle from the SAAP unit in Victoria has maintained a supportive interest in the research. Sue James, the coor-

dinator of the Extra Edge program in Victoria, has been an invaluable source of assistance. Lesley Podesta supported our research when she was Director of the Office of Youth Affairs in Victoria, and this began a long standing good relationship with that department. Peter Jones from the Office significantly influenced the work we have done, and his thoughtful encouragement is gratefully acknowledged. In the final stages of preparing a recent report (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1997), Gina Fiske helped us frame the policy ideas in a more appropriate way, and we hope some of that good advice has influenced Chapter 11. Some of the arguments in this book were first tried out in that report, and we thank the Commonwealth-State Youth Co-ordination Committee in Victoria for permission to draw liberally on this work.

A special mention should also be made of Allan Morris, MHR for Newcastle, and formerly Chairperson of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs. The Committee's (1995) *Report into Aspects of Youth Homelessness* had an important role in changing the way policy makers understand youth homelessness. Allan Morris gave his time generously, and he worked tirelessly to get things happening, as did Bjarne Nordin, the secretary to the Committee. Their work has not been sufficiently acknowledged in recent times.

Thanks also to the 'critical friends' who were brought together by the Australian Centre for Equity through Education to discuss an early draft of the book, and to offer comment and advice. They were Sharon Burrows (Australian Education Union), Frances Davies (Youth Bureau, DEETYA), Kathy Desmond (KITS Project), David Eldridge (Salvation Army and Prime Minister's Youth Homeless Taskforce), Sue James (Extra Edge Program, Victoria), Rafaela Galati-Brown (Principal, Northlands Secondary College), Roger Holdsworth (Youth Research Centre, Melbourne University), Pat Thomson

(Principal, Paralowie High School), and Viv White (National Schools Network).

Joan Brown, our publisher, deserves a special mention. She always believed in this project and she was instrumental in gaining funding for it. Her patience and gentle encouragement were just right as we struggled to achieve the final manuscript.

Monash University and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology have given us leave to work on the research, and our colleagues in the Department of Anthropology at Sociology (Monash) and the Department of Justice and Youth Studies (RMIT) have been supportive over many years. Thanks to Sarah Pinkney (RMIT) and Scott Ewing (Swinburne University) whose work we quote in Chapter 8; and to three former graduate students - Janet Bryant (Swinburne University), Karalyn McDonald (La Trobe University) and Bruce Smith - whose work we quote in Chapter 11.

Thanks to Sue Kinkead of the Department of Justice and Youth Studies at RMIT and Haze Hunter from the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at Monash University who have provided administrative support for the project. Haze has supported this project as if were her own. It has been enormously helpful to know that the administrative and financial arrangements were always in good order.

We have published a number of articles in journals prior to this book. We gratefully acknowledge the editorial wisdom of Robyn Lincoln at the *Australian Journal of Social Issue* and Shelia Allison at *Youth Studies Australia*. For anyone who is interested, the articles and two reports are referred to in the bibliography. The purpose of publishing short reports during a research journey is to bring new findings into the public arena as quickly as possible. Inevitably, a period of reflection will lead to some changes in most analyses. We do not resile from what we have written in the past, but we have taken this opportunity to improve the

presentation of some arguments, and to correct some figures which were slightly inaccurate when published in 1996.

Finally, we have important debts to our closest friends and family members. They have borne the brunt of our irregular hours, academic distemper, inexcusable forgetfulness, and the disruption caused by our frequent periods away from home. Our gratitude to those closest to us is profound.

C. C.
D. M.
Melbourne,
March 1998.

Statement about Confidentiality

The young people referred to in this book are real and the events that are described actually happened. However, we have changed people's names, the dates that events occurred, and various other personal details to conceal the identity of those concerned. We have also changed the names of boarding houses, schools and some public places.

Part 1

Youth Homelessness

CHAPTER 1

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS BECOMES A PUBLIC ISSUE

Each year new and vital issues arise to compete for attention from the media, from government and from the community at large. Most are reduced to simple terms and quickly disposed of ... Only rarely does an issue have such overriding importance that it survives the 'fast turnover' treatment to establish a place in the public conscience as a subject in its own right, with its own history, its own lexicon and its own place on future agendas ....

In 1989, youth homelessness was just such an issue ... it was in 1989, with the release of **Our Homeless Children** *(The Burdekin Report) that it became a critical issue ... The facts that came to light - the large numbers of young people involved, the wide age range, the family circumstances, the long duration of homelessness - triggered responses from every sector of society.*

(National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies 1989, p.1)

In the Field

On the banks of the River Yarra, there are two young men and two young women who have been living at the city square. They are sitting on a parapet, drinking beer, and there is a faint smell of marijuana in the air. They know we work at the city agency, and one of the young men starts a conversation.

'G'day, mates. How's youse going?'
'All right. Getting some sun, huh?'
'Yeah. Are you going to the agency?'
'Yep.'
'We're coming in for a shower later'.
'Uh, huh.'
'Is Geoff on tonight?'
'Yeah, probably.'
'Will you tell him, we're coming in? Tell him I wanna talk to him!'

We climb the steep steps into the back of Flinders Street Station. It is 37 degrees on a sweltering Summer afternoon, and the concourse is packed with commuters rushing to get the next train home. People look hot and uncomfortable in the searing heat. 'Stopping at every station to Frankston. Leaving in one minute', booms the announcer. There is a sudden surge towards platform 7.

Most people do not see homeless teenagers hanging around the station. It is too crowded and the young people are not visible to the casual observer. There are two young men sitting on the station steps, smoking. The boys light another cigarette, and drift slowly down Flinders Street. Are they waiting for the service to open? They look no different from other teenagers in jeans and T-shirts, but homeless teenagers rarely do.

A slim, young woman, about 16, is reading the opening hours on the agency door. She checks the clock at Flinders Street Station and then wanders slowly around the concourse. Ten minutes later, she is back in the doorway outside the agency.

Sharp on 5pm, the doors swing open and the young woman slips in, followed by the two young men. Twenty minutes later, there are 14 young people in the service.

5.30pm

A boy living in a squat is using the shower in the amenities area,

and there are five young people in the queue. Robbo is next and he promises to be quick. But after 10 minutes, the shower is still going, and people in the queue are becoming agitated.

'Robbo! Robbo! What the fuck are you doing in there? Hurry up!', yells his mate Jason.

'I'm next', demands Nicos, glaring at Jason. 'I was here before you'.

'Don't fucking push in!', retorts Jason. 'I'm next!'

'Piss off!', says Nicos.

At that moment Robbo's voice rises over the sound of heavy rain in the shower, and the argument is temporarily deflected. 'Are there any towels? I need a fucking towel. Jase get me a towel for Christ's sake!'

Jason turns to the worker on the front desk: 'Geoff! Robbo needs a towel. Can he have a towel?' Jason and Robbo have been before, and they understand the procedures of the agency. Geoff leans over to get a towel, but he is temporarily distracted when a young woman comes rushing into the agency at high speed. 'They're fucking after me!', she yells, before bolting into the toilet and slamming the door.

Geoff looks momentarily stunned. His two female colleagues are interviewing clients in the small partitioned offices at the back of the agency, and they cannot be disturbed. When a client is taken to the interview room, it usually means that there is a 'crisis' of some description. Carol is interviewing the young woman who was waiting in the doorway, and Judy is interviewing an older female client. Meanwhile, Geoff has been left on his own to deal with inquiries and to keep order.

'Fucking watch it!', yells Nicos, as the argument breaks out again.

'Do you wanna knuckle sandwich, you fucking wog?', yells Jason.

'Stop it, immediately!', demands Geoff in a loud voice.

'I've already told you. Nicos is next. That's it! Both of you stop arguing!'

'No, he fucking isn't', asserts Jason defiantly. 'I'm next'.

Geoff moves directly in front of Jason, looking him in the eye. Jason is a slim youth of 18 with a great deal of bravado. 'You know the rules, Jase'.

'It's not fair', says Jason, now sounding rather less sure of himself. 'I was here before him. I'm next. It's not fair'.

In the background, Robbo can be heard yelling from the shower. 'Jase! I wanna towel!'

'Listen, Jase. You might have been here before Nicos, but you didn't tell me that you wanted a shower. It's just like anywhere else. You've got to book in. That's fair. Nicos won't be long and then you're next. OK?'

'Geoff! Geoff! pleads Robbo in the background. 'I wanna fucking towel. Please! I'm wet!'

Geoff leans over and tosses a towel into the shower area.

6.30pm

We are sitting in the corner, slowly sorting the contact sheets from the previous night. Opposite is a young woman in her early 20s, with a child and a battered suitcase. Josie has come from Tasmania to meet her boyfriend, but the young man has not turned up, and she has no money and nowhere to go.

Around 6.40pm two young men come in. Carlos is in his early 20s and Sergei is about 17. They are living in a disused warehouse.

'Are there any food parcels tonight?'

'Nope. You had one last night'.

'Oh, come on Geoff! Please, Geoff! We're starving!'

'You know the rules. No-one can have a food parcel two nights in a row. Our resources are limited'.

'Ohh! Come on, Geoff. Please, Geoff! We haven't got any money!'

Geoff hesitates. 'Where are you staying?'

'In a squat near Spencer Street', answers Carlos.

'Has your mate had a food parcel?'

'No, he ain't had one', says Carlos quickly.

Geoff looks sceptical.

'No, I ain't had one. Honestly!', says the younger lad.

Geoff hesitates again. 'Hmm, OK guys'. He gives them a food parcel from below the counter.

8pm

Twenty-four young people have now come into the service. One young woman has dropped in for a chat with Judy (staff member):

> Sarah James popped in ... says her methadone program is going very well ... She's been visiting the CES, looking for a job. Nothing yet ...

Sarah lives in a hostel, and she likes to drop in to talk with Judy, who she has known for a while. She has not come in for anything in particular, but Judy is the person she turns to when she needs support.

Most of the young people have been 'regulars', but there have been three 'newies'. Margaret, 23, has just come out of the detox:

> ... seeking accommodation ... rang around the refuges, but no-one would take her ... seems Margaret has caused a lot of trouble in the past. Gave her a voucher for the Eldorado (a boarding house) ... told her to come back tomorrow.

Judy has been interviewing two young men, and she is conferring with Geoff about what to do. 'Paul and Todd have just hitch-hiked from Adelaide. They're looking for work. What else? No money and nowhere to stay, of course', she says.

Geoff looks resigned.

'I told them we have a recession here too', says Judy in a slightly exasperated tone.

'How old are they?' asks Geoff.

'Both 18. So they're too old to get them into a refuge'.

'Hmm. Give them an overnight voucher for the Barklay (a run down boarding house). You need to talk to them about heading back to Adelaide. It's no good them staying here'.

Much later

Many young people come to the service after 9pm. Most are 'regulars', and some are members of the floating group of homeless teenagers who frequent the inner city. This night, the project logbook is loaded with entries:

> *9pm*
>
> Lots of alcohol around tonight ... making some clients very aggressive and confrontational - eg Danny Shonfield. First time I've experienced him in his 'I hate you all' mode. 'You're all fucking cunts' etc ...
>
> *10pm*
>
> Lots of police around too. About an hour ago Jason Forbes was standing out the front ... when suddenly the Divi van pulls up and three police jump out ... Jason bundled into the van and taken away ... He returned just now with two black eyes ... very dazed ... I gave him a couple of bags of ice ...

Geoff was responsible for tidying up, finishing the paper work and locking up. His last entry:

> *11.15pm*
>
> Pretty hectic from 9pm to 11pm. Lots of kids around. Lots of pills ...Kylie French and Dana Mitropoulos pilled off their faces ... lying on the waiting room floor, completely out of it. We called an ambulance because we couldn't wake them ... Altogether 42 contacts tonight, but we didn't get everybody who came in after 9pm.

This was the city agency where we worked for two years in the early 1990s. It was an information and referral service for homeless young people, located close to Melbourne's busy Flinders Street Station. The service was called 'the Information Deli' because it was located in a former delicatessen. There was a large,

battered sign above the shop front announcing 'DELI', possibly a reminder of former glory. Youth workers call this the 'hard end' of youth work, because many of the Deli's clients were chronically disadvantaged. At this time 'street kids' were in the news. The Burdekin Report (1989) was calling for action, and a number of new initiatives were in the pipeline.

Early Recognition of the Problem

In the 1960s and 1970s teenage homelessness was not recognised as a significant social problem, and the number of homeless young people appears to have been small. According to Archbishop Peter Hollingworth (1993, p.v):

> ... the great difference between the 1960s and the 1990s is that (youth) homelessness was viewed as an individual problem affecting a few. It was never defined as a societal problem of serious proportions.

The emergence of a younger group of people in the homeless population was first noted by Alan Jordan in 1973 who identified a 'more or less distinct population of homeless adolescents and young people with a mode age of 22 or 23' (Jordan 1973, p.136). Several reports and articles followed in the late 1970s (eg Department of Social Security 1978), leading to a Senate inquiry in 1982.

The Senate's *Report on Homeless Youth* (1982) was the first 'milestone' on the itinerary of youth homelessness to public recognition as a social problem. The report was brief for a parliamentary inquiry, and it noted the lack of information on the size of problem:

> So unreliable are the statistics available on the extent of youth homelessness that the Committee was hesitant to refer to them at all ... Until such time as a properly conducted survey is undertaken, with adequate supervision and controls, there will continue to be conjecture as to the actual extent of the problem and whether or not the problem is increasing. (1982, p.30)

The Senate's report had little public impact in 1982. However, the report drew youth homelessness to the attention of policy makers, and it provided the basis for some limited expenditure by both State and Commonwealth Governments. In 1985, the development of the national Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) consolidated several smaller housing programs into one joint Commonwealth-State program, and SAAP became 'the centrepiece of the Federal Government's response to acute housing crisis and homelessness' (Fopp 1996, p.209). The development of SAAP was followed in 1986 by the provision of a special benefit for homeless young people, known as Young Homeless Allowance (Maas and Hartley1988).

Burdekin Report

Youth homelessness become widely recognised as a community problem following the publication of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1989) report, *Our Homeless Children*. This became known as the 'Burdekin Report' after the Chairperson of the Inquiry, Mr Brian Burdekin, the Federal Human Rights Commissioner.

The Inquiry opened in Sydney in October, 1987. Over the next nine months, it conducted hearings in 20 metropolitan centres across the country, taking evidence from 300 witnesses. The Inquiry also placed newspaper advertisements, inviting written submissions. More than 160 were received - from individuals, organisations and government departments. Members of the Inquiry also conducted informal discussions, visiting workers and homeless children at more than 20 refuges and youth services. In addition, the Commissioners ordered seven in-depth reports, including one on the number of homeless youth. The final report was a complex document of more than 350 pages. There were 24 chapters on specific issues, 77 recommendations and five appendices.

The Burdekin Report received front page headlines when it was released on 22 February 1989. There were many follow up articles in the next few months, and some dramatic television documentaries. It evoked an enormous amount of public comment from politicians, welfare agencies, policy experts and other community leaders, as well as stirring up immense interest in the general community. Much of the public discussion was reported in the mass media, which kept the issue on the agenda for many months.

The media played an important role in bringing the Burdekin Report to a broad community audience. Journalists use *signifiers* to convey important messages. These can include evocative phrases which become attached to a particular issue ('Street Kids'); dramatic messages conveyed in headlines ('70,000 Children in Peril'); or photographs which typify a social problem in a particular way (teenagers sleeping in public places). Three signifiers were particularly important in media coverage of the Burdekin Report.

50,000 to 70,000 Homeless Youth

First, there was the number of homeless youth. The commissioners ordered a specialist inquiry by Dr Rodney Fopp 'to examine all of the available data and prepare an estimate of the number of homeless children and young people' (HREOC 1989, p.5). Fopp (1989a, p.365) concluded that the minimum figure was 50,000 and that there could be as many as 70,000 homeless young people aged 12 to 24 each night, including some young people who might be 'at risk'.

On the other hand, the commissioners proposed a figure between 20,000 and 25,000 (HREOC 1989, p.69). These dissonant estimates created a great deal of confusion. As Fopp (1989b, p.12) pointed out:

> ... the press had a great deal of difficulty in coming to grips with the number of young people estimated to be homeless ... Burdekin estimated between 20,000-25,000 children and young people were homeless ... while the Inquiry's consultant estimated that between 50,000-70,000 young people ... were in the same category. Almost all the permutations between the two figures, the terms 'children' and 'young people' and various age ranges were printed.

The figure of 50,000 to 70,000 gradually became the more influential. It was quoted in academic circles (Alder and Sandor 1989, p.3; Dwyer 1989, p.3; Alder 1991, p.1; Davis 1993, p.23). It was referred to by public figures such as the Premier of Victoria (The Age, 19 November 1991) and Justice Marcus Einfeld (National Press Club, 17 June 1992). It was increasingly quoted in the press, and it was endorsed in publications designed for youth workers:

> The report estimates the conservative figure of young homeless in Australia at 20,000-25,000, but says that as many as 50,000-70,000 children aged from seven to 18 are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless soon. (National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies 1989, p.3)

The number of homeless youth was an important signifier in the public debate and it continues to be a salient issue.

Street Kids

The second signifier which received particular attention was the character of the problem. The Burdekin Report emphasised the plight of homeless young people and the deprivations they experience. For this account, it drew heavily on the research of Dr Ian O'Connor (1989), as well as the testimony of many expert witnesses directly involved in dealing with homeless youth.

The report (1989, pp.43-44) recognised that the homeless population is characterised by temporal diversity, but this issue was only touched upon briefly. It noted that some young people

experience homelessness for a short period of time, others have a longer term problem, and others become chronically homeless. The report also drew attention to school students, but this was covered in Chapter 22, and the issue never surfaced in the public debate.

Chapter 5 ('The Experience of Homelessness') was widely quoted in the press. It contained many examples of young people who appeared to be chronically homeless:

> A Salvation Army representative... told the Inquiry of a 15 year old girl ... who had spent two year's living in women's toilets ... she had spent some nights ... in the company of girls of 12 and 13. (HREOC 1989, p.46)

> In Melbourne the Inquiry was told ... some of these young people were at (the refuge) when they were 13 or 14. They are now coming back at 18 or 19. (HREOC 1989, p.44)

The chapter concluded:

> Tragically, for many: They keep on wandering and they die young. (HREOC 1989, p.59)

Similar themes were taken up in media coverage of the issue, and press articles were often accompanied by dramatic pictures of young people living in derelict buildings or sleeping in public places. The Burdekin Report played an important role in consolidating the public typification that most homeless teenagers are 'street kids' who have a 'chronic problem' with homelessness.

Need for Action

The third thrust of Burdekin's Report was the need for action. Burdekin argued that not only does the present situation represent a major tragedy for many thousands of young people, but it also 'represents a failure by governments to fulfil our international commitment to protect the rights of children' (1989, p.33). The report pointed out that 'this commitment has been

made at the international level in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child ... and at the national level by the incorporation of these international agreements in federal law' (1989, p.33).

Burdekin emphasised the grave lack of appropriate service provision for homeless youth, that these young people were not to blame for their situation, and he pointed to major problems of coordination between services provided by the States and the Commonwealth Government. The report proposed a complex agenda of reform (see: Summary of Recommendations, pp.321-333), and it urged the Commonwealth to ensure that the States dramatically improve their assistance to homeless youth.

Community Issue

The Burdekin Report was instrumental in making youth homelessness into a community issue. It raised public awareness of the issue and it engendered a widespread community feeling that 'something ought to be done'. Many people became aware that there could be 50,000 to 70,000 street kids.

One indication of Burdekin's influence is the fact that an article on youth homelessness appeared in *Cosmopolitan* magazine:

> These are the facts: The Burdekin Report on homeless youth estimated ... between 50,000 and 70,000 street kids in Australia overall. (Finch 1995, p.22)

The Burdekin Report consolidated the public typification that most homeless young people are street kids who have a chronic problem with homelessness. This was already the dominant framework within which public policy responses had been developed and implemented, and it was the way that some people in the community understood the issue. The Burdekin Report reinforced this perspective and it took the message to a much wider audience.

The report also had a major impact on politicians in both major parties and on public servants who formulate policy

responses in this area. Both groups are sensitive about media coverage of public issues, and the furore in the press galvanised them into action. As Fopp (1989b, p.12) put it:

> With the press screaming, the Federal Government received the message (and an enormous headache), the state governments went into a frenzy

The Commonwealth acted quickly. On budget day 1989, the Commonwealth announced a '$100 million Social Justice Package for Young Australians' over the next four years:

> More than half of the expenditure will directly assist homeless young people through a doubling of accommodation capacity, substantial improvements in the Young Homeless Allowance (YHA) and better health services ... They represent a significant response to the issues raised by the recent Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (Burdekin) Report... (Quoted in National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies 1989, p.41)

Many of these initiatives were positive, but a significant amount of the money was directed to pilot projects and other initiatives with a fairly limited life span. One of the pilot projects was the city agency where we worked for two years in the early 1990s. It became one of the best known Burdekin initiatives in Victoria.

CHAPTER 2

ISSUES OF DEFINITION AND NEED

The Information Deli opened in December 1989, nine months after the release of the Burdekin Report. It was an advice and referral service, and its target group was homeless young people aged 12 to 24.

Staff could contact refuges or shelters on behalf of clients to find out if beds were available, especially for those under 18. For those with no money, the service could provide vouchers for overnight accommodation in cheap, inner city, boarding houses or other types of emergency accommodation. This was dependent on funds being available, and support was usually rationed to a few nights' emergency accommodation. In some cases, staff would refer clients to long term housing options, but there was an acute shortage of long term placements, and it often took some months to find a long term option.

Staff could also help young people access other services, by making telephone calls or arranging appointments for them. Once a week, a representative from the Department of Social Security came to the project to deal with clients' enquiries, and on another evening a lawyer was present to give free legal advice. The project also provided small amounts of material aid, including food parcels, second hand clothing, public transport tickets

and pharmacy prescriptions. There were facilities for storing luggage, taking a shower, and clients could use the service as a mailing address. Finally, the agency provided support and counselling services.

Our task was to carry out an evaluation of the new service. In 1990, 1,500 people used the agency on 7,000 occasions and they made 10,000 requests for services. In 1991, somewhat more detailed information was collected on 1,800 people who came to the agency 10,000 times, making 13,000 requests for services. There were 300 clients who are included in both the 1990 and 1991 data sets. Therefore, the combined database (1990 and 1991) includes information on 3,000 individuals (1,500 + 1,800 - 300 = 3,000).

Issues of definition and need were a central preoccupation of the evaluation. Some 'local sceptics' doubted whether most of the clients using the centre were actually homeless. One critic described it as 'basically a drop in centre'. As it turned out, the research found that 85 per cent of clients were homeless while in contact with the service, and most (80 per cent) were aged 12 to 24 (1,858 individuals).

We begin by discussing what is meant by 'homelessness'. This involves theorising homelessness, and then explaining why there are many competing definitions in the literature. After that we describe the characteristics of the homeless population, and then we examine the needs of homeless youth. Finally, we identify two puzzles raised by the research.

Definition and Meaning

> The definition of who is homeless ... has been as much a subject of debate as the question of how many homeless there are. (Peroff 1987, p.37)

> There is no correct definition; rather different definitions have different uses. (Redburn and Buss 1986, p.14)

> The questions - What is homelessness? Who are the homeless? ... are I think simply unanswerable. (Field 1988, p.11)

An examination of the literature revealed that there is no agreement as to how the concept of homelessness should be defined. Most people accept that those who are without conventional forms of shelter are homeless (literal homelessness), but beyond this there is little agreement about the parameters of the homeless population. The following questions are often raised.

Is someone homeless who is staying in temporary accommodation (eg a friend's place)? What about a person moving from place to place (eg from friends and relatives to emergency accommodation and back)? How about a person living in a boarding house without security of tenure? What about a person in an institution, if they have nowhere to go when they leave? How about a person in an unsatisfactory relationship, but who is afraid to leave?

In the recent literature, these questions have been answered differently, depending upon the broader perspectives of different authors (see, for example: Watson 1984, 1986; Rossi 1989; Roth and Bean 1986). One influential interpretation has concluded that all definitions are arbitrary:

> My own view is that the concept of homelessness is not a useful one, and should be rethought or abandoned. (Watson 1984, p.70)

> The definition of homelessness is ... irresolvable. If there cannot even be agreement about whether or not sleeping rough constitutes homelessness, so there evidently can be no overall agreement about homelessness ... (Hutson and Liddiard 1994, p.29)

The latter statement involves an extreme form of conceptual relativism, whereby 'homelessness' is understood as a purely arbitrary notion, and one person's definition is as good as another's.

The most widely quoted definition in Australia has been developed by the National Youth Coalition for Housing

(NYCH), and it also involves 'relativism'. According to NYCH, homelessness is:

> ... the absence of secure, adequate and satisfactory shelter as perceived by the young person and for homelessness to exist, at least one of the following conditions, or any combination of conditions should be operative:
>
> (a) an absence of shelter
> (b) the threat of loss of shelter
> (c) very high mobility between places of abode
> (d) existing accommodation considered inadequate by the resident for such reasons as overcrowding, the physical state of the residence, lack of security of occupancy, or lack of emotional support and stability in the place of residence
> (e) unreasonable restrictions in terms of alternative forms of accommodation. (NYCH, 1985:1)

According to this definition, homelessness only occurs if there is an 'absence of secure, adequate and satisfactory shelter *as perceived by the young person*', (NYCH 1985, p.1, emphasis added)[1]. It means that, young people in conventional accommodation may be considered homeless if they:

(i) feel that their flat is in a bad state of repair ('the physical state of the residence')
(ii) do not get on with other family members ('a lack of emotional support')
(iii) think the landlord might sell the house ('lack of security of occupancy')

Conversely, a young person may be classified as 'housed' if they are living in a squat but think this is satisfactory.

The NYCH definition involves an extreme form of relativism, because young people living in objectively similar conditions (flats or houses) can be classified as either 'housed' or 'homeless' depending on their perceptions; and teenagers who are obviously

[1]The NYCH definition has been widely used in recent times. It is, for example, the definition quoted in O'Connor (1989), Hirst (1989) and Fopp (1989a). In 1989 and 1997 the definition was revised, but it was not changed in any fundamental way (see: NYCH, 1989 and 1997). We have used the version that is widely quoted.

homeless (living in deserted buildings) can be classified as 'housed' if they find squatting acceptable. The NYCH definition did not work when we tried to use it in a practical context.

It is necessary to overcome the disabling problem of 'relativism', because endless arguments about 'definition' undermine attempts to get things done. After all, if homelessness is impossible to define, why should governments act to alleviate this nebulous condition? We came to the view that the relativism can be overcome *theoretically*, once it is recognised that 'homelessness' and 'inadequate housing' are socially constructed, cultural concepts that only make sense in a particular community at a given historical period (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1992). Homelessness is indeed a relative concept because it is a cultural construct, but this does not mean that 'homelessness' is just a matter of opinion, or that all definitions are 'arbitrary'.

Theorising Homelessness

Homelessness is a relative concept that acquires meaning in relation to the housing conventions of a particular culture. In a society where the vast majority of the population live in mud huts, the community standard will be that mud huts constitute adequate accommodation (Watson 1986, p.10). In order to define homelessness, it is necessary to identify the shared community standards about the minimum housing that people have the right to expect in order to live according to the conventions and expectations of a particular culture.

Community standards are usually embedded in the housing practices of a society. These identify the conventions and cultural expectations of a community in an objective sense, and will be recognised by most people because they accord with what they see around them. As Professor Townsend (1979, p.51) suggests:

> A population comes to expect to live in particular types of homes ... Their

> environment ... create(s) their needs in an objective as well as a subjective sense.

In Australia, the vast majority of the population live in suburban houses or self-contained flats, and there is a widespread view that home ownership is the most desirable form of tenure (Kemeny 1983, p.1). Most people evidently believe that an independent person (or couple) should be able to expect at least a room to sleep in, a room to live in, kitchen and bathroom facilities of their own, and an element of security of tenure - because that is the minimum accommodation that most people achieve who rent in the private market. The minimum community standard is equivalent to a small rented flat, and this is significantly below the culturally desired option of an owner occupied house.

The 'minimum community standard' is not specified in any formal regulations, although existing housing regulations may imply a minimum standard. Rather, it is a cultural construct which identifies the lower boundary of a particular cultural domain and identifies the standards embodied in current housing practices. It provides a benchmark for assessing 'homelessness' and 'inadequate housing' in the contemporary context.

However, the benchmark cannot be used in a purely mechanistic way, and its application must be sensitive to cultural meaning systems. For example, there are a number of institutional settings where people do not have the minimum level of accommodation identified by the community standard, but in cultural terms they would not be considered part of the homeless population. This includes people living in seminaries, elderly people living in nursing homes, students in university halls of residence, people in prison, and so forth.

While it is true that housing and homelessness constitutes a continuum of circumstances, there are four broad 'groups' which fall below the community standard. This results in a three tiered model of the homeless population - primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness:

(1)*Primary homelessness*

People without conventional accommodation (living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter).

(2)*Secondary homelessness*

(moving around/temporary accommodation)

People who move around frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another, including: people using emergency accommodation; teenagers staying in youth refuges; people residing temporarily with friends or relatives; and those using boarding houses on an occasional or intermittent basis.

(3)*Tertiary homelessness*

(boarding house population)

People living in single rooms on a medium to long-term basis. Residents of private boarding houses do not have a separate bedroom and living room; they do not have kitchen and bathroom facilities of their own; their accommodation is not self contained; and they do not have security of tenure provided by a lease. They are homeless, because their accommodation is inferior to the characteristics identified in the 'community standard'.

(4)*Marginally housed*

People in accommodation situations which are only slightly below the community norm. This category would include: a couple living in a single room with their own kitchen and bathroom, but without a separate room for sleeping; or a family staying with relatives (doubling up); or a couple renting a caravan without security of tenure.

Primary homelessness

This is the least contentious category because it accords with the common sense assumption that homelessness is the same as 'roof-lessness'. However, when we read the case histories of homeless

clients, we found that only 18 per cent were in the primary population while in contact with the agency (Table 2.1). These young people were mainly sleeping in public places (streets, parks etc) or squatting in deserted buildings.

Table 2.1 Characteristics of homeless clients by age group, 1991 database

	Age 12 to 17 years (N=523)	Age 18 to 24 years (N=624)	All homeless (N=1,147)*
	%	%	%
Primary homelessness (streets/squats etc)	21	16	18
Secondary homelessness (moving around/temporary accommodation)	68	67	68
Tertiary homelessness (boarding houses)	3	14	9
Supported accommodation (youth housing program/hostels)	8	3	5
	100	100	100

*Information on 97 per cent of cases.

Paul Podesta, 18, made 15 contacts with the agency between January and April, and he was usually 'on the streets' or 'in a squat'. His first contact was on 16 January when he came in asking for food. He did not have the required forms of identification to be eligible for unemployment benefits, and he had run out of money. He was given a food parcel and asked to come back the next day. Paul returned three days later, having spent the previous night in a squat. A staff member recorded:

> Very keen to get work, but he has no real employment history. He will need a lot of encouragement and support while he is looking for work.

He returned to the agency a number of times over the next eight weeks, but he was unsuccessful at finding work. On March 15, a staff member noted:

> Still has no income. Told Paul he must get his unemployment benefit sorted out ... he seemed a bit spaced out.

His final contact was on 20 April:

> Looking for clean needles ... says he's going to Adelaide.

Secondary homelessness

The largest group (68 per cent) of homeless young people were in the secondary population. Just over 80 per cent of these young men and women were moving from place to place, and the remainder were either staying temporarily with friends or relatives, or they were in emergency accommodation.

Linda Ferreira, 17, has been out of home for nearly two years. During this time she has been in many refuges and spent occasional nights 'on the streets'. She first arrived at the city agency on 13 September and requested four nights emergency accommodation at Gordon House. She returned a number of times in the next few days and was given further assistance on 18 September. On 22 September she moved to a friend's place in Collingwood. This did not work, and after three days she moved to another friend who let her stay for a week. She returned to the agency on 14 October. She had been living at Merri Squat, but someone had bashed her up. Her last contact with the agency was on 19 October, when she came in with her new boyfriend for a chat. Linda and Tony were planning to hitch-hike to Sydney.

It is clear that Linda has no 'home', in the normal sense of that word. Nonetheless, most of the time she is not literally 'on the streets', although she has slept out occasionally. Instead, her homelessness is characterised by continual insecurity, and frequent moves from one form of temporary shelter to another. It is

also relevant to note that in Linda's case there is evidence of itinerancy. This is common as homeless young people enter their mid to late teens, and it is often associated with the search for work.

Terry Cameron, 20, is typical of a number of young people who come out of institutions. Terry was released from Pentridge Prison on 15 October, but he had nowhere to go. He stayed at a friend's place for two nights and he borrowed $100 from a relative (although that person was not prepared to let him stay). From there he went to dormitory accommodation at the Gill at $10.50 per night which he paid for himself. He stayed there for four nights and then spent one night on the streets. On 23 October, he came to the city agency asking for food and emergency accommodation. His unemployment benefit was due later that week, and he was given two night's emergency accommodation at Gordon House. Three weeks later, a staff member recorded:

> Terry has been staying at Ozanam House (emergency accommodation), but left because too many fights there. At a friend's place last night, but can't stay. Rang St Kilda Crisis Centre: no vacancies. Suggested Staffa House, but Terry refused. Says people there are after him. Finally, got him in at the Gill (dormitory accommodation) for two nights.

Secondary homelessness is characterised by continual insecurity and frequent moves from one place to another. The Burdekin Report (1989) pointed out that some young people in the secondary population spend occasional nights on the street or squatting in derelict buildings. We attempted to quantify this, using the information about where clients had spent the previous night. Table 2.2 shows that 47 per cent of those in the secondary homeless population had spent at least one night on the streets (or in a squat) prior to coming to the service. The figure is 28 per cent for those who came to the agency once or twice, but it rises to 59 per cent amongst those who came three to five times, and for those who came on six or more occasions it is 77 per cent.

It is possible that the lower figure for those who come once or twice is a consequence of their smaller number of contacts, rather than an indicator that they have different experiences.

ble 2.2 **Experience of sleeping rough, young people in the secondary homeless population, by number of contacts, 1991 database**

	1 to 2 contacts (N=427)	3 to 5 contacts (N=132)	6 or more contacts (N=216)	All contacts (N=775)
	%	%	%	%
Experience of sleeping rough (streets/squats etc.)	28	59	77	47

Tertiary homelessness

The major empirical studies of homelessness in the 1960s and early 1970s focused on people in the tertiary population (de Hoog 1972; Jordan 1973; Bogue 1963; Bahr and Caplow 1973; Blumberg, Shipley and Shandler 1973). These people were said to be living on 'skid row', and the term was used to refer to those inner city areas where the poorest section of the community lived in single rooms in cheap boarding houses. At that time, the skid row population was disproportionately made up of middle aged and older men. Some lived permanently in the same lodging houses, whereas others moved more frequently if they were itinerant workers. The boarding house population still mainly includes older people, but Table 2.1 shows that nine per cent of our sample were in the tertiary population.

Christine Cousins, 21, lived 'anywhere' in her younger days, but in the second half of 1991 she was renting a room in a boarding house for $82 per week. She came to the city agency on 3 September requesting help:

> Very distressed about the custody of her daughter (Jade, 12 months) ... Also needs assistance with back rent. The rooming house is holding her possessions ... Chris is going to need a lot of support ...

David Ridgway, 24, used to be on the streets, but now he rents a room in a boarding house for $79 per week. He came to the city agency on 7 November:

> Requesting assistance with rent. Has been at ----- nearly six months. A week behind with his rent and no benefits due 'til 12/11. Requesting food too. Gave him an overnight voucher and told him to get his act together.

Young people in boarding houses have often been on the streets in the past, but as they get older they try to rent a single room. They are usually poor and they often need support to maintain their accommodation. They are 'homeless' because a single room with shared bathroom and cooking facilities does not approximate to the minimum accommodation identified in the community standard.

Finally, five per cent of the sample were in long-term housing options for homeless people, such as youth housing programs. In one sense they are the 'housed' section of the homeless population, because they now have secure accommodation. Jackie Shannon, 19, has been out of home since she was 14, but she now lives in a youth housing program with two other young women. One of the questions on the contact sheet asks whether the young person has ever been in a refuge. Jackie writes, 'every fucking refuge in Melbourne'. Young people in long-term options are included in official counts such as the SAAP national data collection, because they usually have a long history of homelessness and they often need continuing support.

Definitions serve different purposes

The range of definitions found in the literature can now be explained. It is a consequence of the fact that different groups formulate operational definitions which are needed in particular contexts. These definitions are rarely informed theoretically, but they serve a range of practical purposes.

Government departments have developed *bureaucratic* definitions in order to decide who may have access to particular benefits. These 'definitions' are usually complex and they specify exactly which criteria have to be fulfilled for a person to be eligible for a particular welfare benefit such as the youth allowance at the homeless rate.

Then there are *advocacy* definitions used by agencies to draw the attention of governments and the community to the plight of homeless people. These are usually couched in broader terms than the definition we have proposed. They often lack specificity and they are primarily designed to point out that certain sections of the population are needy:

> A homeless person is without a conventional home ... She/he is often cut off from the support of relatives and friends, she/he has few independent resources and often has no immediate means and in some cases, little future prospects of self-support. (Council to Homeless Persons, Victoria)

Advocacy definitions often include statements about need.

Governments use *service delivery* definitions, designed to identify the target groups eligible for particular services. One important example is contained in the Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994):

> A person is homeless if, and only if, he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing.
>
> A person is taken to have inadequate access to safe and secure housing if the only housing to which the person has access:
>
> (a) damages, or is likely to damage, the person's health; or
>
> (b) threatens the person's safety; or
>
> (c) marginalises the person through failing to provide access to:
>
> (i) adequate personal amenities; or
>
> (ii) the economic and social support that a home normally affords; or
>
> (d) places the person in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing.

This definition includes homeless people as well as those who are at imminent risk. It recognises that in practical service delivery terms, SAAP must be able to assist those who are about to become homeless as well as those already homeless. It provides a mandate for the program's activity and this is its over-riding purpose.

The fact that there are many operational definitions does not mean that all definitions are arbitrary. The purpose of theorising a socially constructed, cultural definition was to provide a framework that is neither arbitrary nor reducible to individual subjectivity - because the cultural definition is grounded in evidence about the housing practices in contemporary Australia. The cultural definition is a benchmark for thinking about the validity of operational definitions used in particular contexts.

It will always be the case that definitions are used for different purposes. There should be nothing surprising about this. However, the disabling problem of intellectual relativism ought to be allowed to die quietly.

Needs of Homeless Youth

The Deli was set up to meet a range of immediate needs. There were 1,600 requests for material aid in the first year. This included requests for food, public transport tickets and chemists' prescriptions. It was common for young people to come in asking for food, and the staff distributed many food parcels. Staff could also give out public transport tickets to young people in need. Sometimes they were given to teenagers to travel to emergency accommodation. Occasionally, these were given to young people who were 'at risk' so they could return home.

The agency could also pay for a young person to travel to secure accommodation in another state, if this seemed appropriate. For example, on 20 October Jacob Johnson, 17, came to the agency requesting assistance to return to Newcastle. Jacob had left home after a serious row with his father. He was not receiving

a Commonwealth benefit, and he was effectively destitute when he turned up at the city agency on 4 October asking for food.

Jacob came a number of times in the following two weeks. On each occasion he asked to have a shower and he always asked for food, although he never requested accommodation. He appears to have spent occasional nights at people's places, a night on the floor in someone's room at a boarding house, and several nights on the streets. When he came to the agency on 20 October he wanted to go back home. He had telephoned his mother and she had told him that his father was 'sorry'. They both wanted Jacob to return.

Later that day he came to the agency asking for assistance. A staff member rang Newcastle to confirm the story. It was true and a decision was made to get Jacob on the overnight bus to Sydney. This was done, but the bus did not leave until 10pm, and as usual Jacob was hungry. He asked if he could have something to eat. The coordinator said that she would give him $10 for food on the journey and he could go round the corner and buy himself a hamburger. When she went to the petty cash tin there was only one $50 note. Maggie hesitated, then handed the note to Jacob and repeated the instructions:

> I'll give you $10 for food on the bus, and get yourself a hamburger now.

Jacob was incredulous:

> Are you trusting me with $50?

He emphasised the words 'me' and '$50', as though he could not believe them.

> Yes, bring me back the change.

He left the agency quickly. It was a gamble, and it was not clear whether we would see him again. But Jacob came back within 10 minutes.

It is important to note that Jacob never requested help with accommodation. This is fairly common, since many homeless young people attempt to fend for themselves much of the time. There were 1,600 requests from assistance with accommodation in the first year, and 71 per cent of clients made at least one request for help. Most of these young people asked for an emergency placement, although a small number were looking for long-term options. This probably reflects the fact that many young people intend to sort things out for themselves; and it may also indicate that young people know that long-term accommodation is rarely available, so they tailor their expectations accordingly.

The Deli was able to help about 75 per cent of those who requested assistance with accommodation. However, it referred most of these young people to paid emergency accommodation (hostels for the homeless, night shelters, boarding houses), and only 15 per cent to youth refuges. There are three reasons for the small number of refuge placements.

First, most youth refuges will not take males over the age of 18, and therefore paid emergency accommodation is the only option for this group. Second, some young people refuse to go to refuges, because they dislike the restrictions. Tanya is 15 and Stavros is 19:

> I explained to Tanya that because of her age I could only refer her to a refuge, and that Stavros would have to go to the Gill (dormitory accommodation). Tanya said 'Thanks, but no thanks. We want to stay together'.

Third, staff could not always find refuge placements for clients when they needed them. For example, Jimmy Fisher, 17, came to the agency asking for help on 13 September. Jimmy had been in a fight at a St Kilda boarding house where he had been staying:

> It was a bad beating. He needs accommodation and food - I couldn't get him into a refuge anywhere. I had to give him a voucher for the Gill (dormitory accommodation for older homeless men).

Judy Hahn is 16:

> Bashed up by two young women on the Flinders Street Steps. Very upset and seeking accommodation. Tried (six refuges named). No vacancies anywhere. Ended up giving her one night at the Stockholm (a run down boarding house).

On these occasions, staff reported that there were no refuge beds to be found anywhere in the city.

There were 2,500 requests for various agency facilities in the first year. These included using the shower, meeting friends, leaving messages, collecting mail and making telephone calls. It is sometimes said that providing these facilities encourages young people to maintain their lifestyle. Possibly this is true in a handful of cases, but most young people who are homeless have experienced a major breakdown in family relationships, and their problems are rarely solved by refusing them food or the opportunity to have a shower.

There were 1,600 requests for support and counselling. The building of supportive relationships with homeless young people is the most important requirement of practical assistance. Janice Fuchs, 21, had been homeless for many months when she first came to the city agency. However, over a few months she developed a strong relationship with Carol (staff member), and with Carol's support she was able to move into a small rented flat with another woman. After this, Janice would occasionally drop in to see Carol for a chat.

When Janice came to the agency on 4 October, she was visibly distressed. Janice was yelling that she had to see Carol immediately. She was in emotional disarray, and an interview was arranged quickly. Janice had had a serious confrontation with her social worker, and it had brought out a great deal of resentment and aggression. Carol was the only person that she felt she could turn to. In the following days, Janice came in to talk to Carol a

number of times. Fortunately, Janice did not 'trash the flat', or hit the woman she shares with, although these are the sorts of things that she has done in the past. Gradually, the crisis passed, and Janice's accommodation remained in tact. It is important to recognise that some young people need on-going support after they have moved to independent accommodation. One way this can be achieved is if they have a friendship with an adult they trust.

Some of the young people who had been helped by agency staff needed an on-going relationship with the worker they were closest to. Sometimes they would come back to the agency to talk to them, or they might telephone if they had some special news. For example, on 2 November Peter Edwards and Julie Simms telephoned Maggie (staff member) from Broken Hill. They had some important news. Peter had been living on the streets for about four months earlier in the year, but he had gone interstate soon after he met Julie who was another agency client. The contact record notes:

> Peter and Julie rang from Broken Hill! They have been to Tassie, Adelaide and now B.H. Peter has a job and they are moving into a Commission house next week. Julie was very excited.

The fact that Peter Edwards has a job is important. It is difficult for young people to get accommodation in the private rental market if they do not have regular employment. Not only do they find it difficult to save enough money for a bond, a month's rent in advance, and money to have gas and electricity turned on, but they also have few possessions, and real estate agents rarely see the young unemployed as desirable tenants.

Moreover, it is particularly difficult for young people who are homeless to get a job. Most of the clients of the city agency left school at the earliest opportunity. They had few vocational skills and they were competing with large numbers of other young people in a depressed labour market. Table 2.3 shows that 83 per cent

of the homeless were unemployed, and about half of these young people had been unemployed for more than a year. Only three per cent of the sample had either a full-time or part-time job. The remaining 14 per cent were students, although this usually means 'at school' rather than tertiary study.

le 2.3 Labour force status of homeless clients by age group, combined database

	Age 12 to 17 (N=799)	Age 18 to 24 (N=1,025)	All homeless (N=1,824)*
	%	%	%
Employed full-time	1	3	2
Employed part-time	1	1	1
Unemployed	71	92	83
Not in labour force (mainly school students)	27	4	14
	100	100	100

*Information on 98 per cent of cases.

le 2.4 Main income of homeless clients by age group, combined database

	Age 12 to 17 (N=716)	Age 18 to 24 (N=868)	All homeless (N=1,584)*
	%	%	%
None	57	16	34
Commonwealth benefit	40	79	62
Wage	2	4	3
Other	1	1	1
	100	100	100

*Information on 85 per cent of cases.

Table 2.4 shows that one-third of all homeless clients were without income at the time they came to the agency, but just over half of those aged 12 to 17 had no income. This is partly a problem of how welfare benefits have been structured for teenagers, but also a result of transient young people losing their benefit by infringing some requirement or other, and then having to renegotiate with the Department of Social Security.

There has been a great deal of public discussion about welfare benefits encouraging young people to leave home, but the available research does not support this interpretation (House of Representatives 1995; Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1997). For example, Crane and Brannock (1996, p.40) found that:

> No young person cited the availability of income support benefits ... as a contributory reason for leaving ... (Crane and Brannock 1996, p.43)

The more common problem on the ground is that homeless teenagers have been unable to access welfare benefits (Morris and Blaskett 1992; Thomson 1993). They often manage by 'doing burgs', 'botting' off mates, 'scabbing' in the city or, in some cases, 'dealing' or street prostitution.

Unemployment does not cause homelessness in any direct sense. The links in the causal chain are more complex than this. Nonetheless, 83 per cent of homeless people at the Deli were unemployed. A young person who leaves home without prospects for employment and income support is at great risk in today's world. If you are homeless it is very difficult to get a permanent job, and if you do not have a permanent job it is very difficult to get secure accommodation.

Conclusion

There has been a long debate about the definition of homelessness, but there is now an emerging consensus about how homelessness should be understood in an Australian context

(Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1992; Neil and Fopp 1992; Burke 1993). First, it is now widely accepted that homelessness is not the same as rooflessness. Young people who are moving from place are part of the homeless population, even though they may have temporary accommodation some of the time. Secondly, it is increasingly recognised that people living in single rooms were the focus of research into homelessness in the 1960s (tertiary homelessness). If this is the case, then they are still part of the homeless population now, because community standards have risen since the 1960s. Third, there is now less tolerance of subjectivist definitions which say that homelessness depends on individual perception.[2]

The emerging agreement on definition identifies three segments in the population - primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness. The House of Representatives (1995) *Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness* used similar categories to frame its 'recommendations relating to public policy initiatives' (1995, p.26), but it added that 'this definition is not necessarily appropriate for targeting benefits and programs, but (it) does reflect an emerging community consensus' (1995, p.26). The Australian Bureau of Statistics also used the three tier definition in its strategy to improve the enumeration of homeless people in the 1996 census (Northwood 1997). This points towards an emerging community agreement about definition, and a recognition that all definitions are not arbitrary.

The Burdekin Report (1989, p.7) also drew attention to the complexity of the homeless population, but in the media coverage which followed, the Report became attached to the public signifier of 'street kids' who have a chronic problem. The research confirms that there are young people like this, but they are about one-fifth of the homeless population. Most homeless teenagers are in the secondary category. They move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another, although many spend

[2]The 1997 version of the NYCH definition says that a young person living in a flat can also be homeless if *they believe* they are paying too 'high(a) proportion of (their) income in rent' (NYCH 1997, p.4). NYCH have learnt nothing from earlier criticisms of their definition (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1992)

occasional nights on the streets or squatting in derelict buildings. This is why it is difficult for ordinary people to see homeless youth. They look no different from other teenagers, and they are not sleeping under bridges most of the time.

The first year of the research also raised two puzzles. First, the fieldwork sensitised us to the fact that not all young people are chronically homeless. For example, Jacob Johnson (from Newcastle) had a serious problem, but he was only homeless for about two and a half weeks. The evaluation of the city agency finished at the end of the first year (Chamberlain, MacKenzie and Brown 1991), but we continued the research for another 12 months because we wanted to investigate the issue of 'duration' systematically. We were interested in how young people move in and out of homelessness, and why some get out of their predicament and others become entrenched. This is discussed in Chapter 4.

Second, there was a puzzle raised by the 'local sceptics'. They were convinced that there could not be 50,000 to 70,000 street kids. The local sceptics included bureaucrats and some advocates. No-one questioned the figures publicly, because they did not want to undermine long overdue Government action on youth homelessness. But in one sense the local sceptics were right, because only about one-fifth of the homeless were 'street kids'. But could there be 50,000 to 70,000 homeless young people, including those in the primary, secondary and tertiary population? We were puzzled by this issue too. Our findings are discussed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

HOW MANY HOMELESS?

Sufficient research has now been completed, however, to enable the Inquiry to estimate that there are at least 20,000 to 25,000 homeless children and young people across the country. We stress that we consider this to be a conservative estimate. Dr Fopp's considered conclusion, based on all the evidence available, was that the likely figure is actually 50,000 to 70,000 children and young people who are homeless or at serious risk. (HREOC 1989, p.69)

This crucial passage was ambiguous because it did not specify which age range the estimates referred to, but since Fopp's figures referred to those aged 12 to 24, then it appeared that the 20,000 to 25,000 estimate referred to this age range as well. The phrase 'we consider this to be a conservative estimate' gave the impression that there were two conflicting estimates of the homeless population, and that the Human Rights Commission did not accept Dr Fopp's figure. However, it was the higher figure which was increasingly preferred in the public debate. Thus, a critical examination of Fopp's estimate is the starting point for our discussion of the extent of homelessness in Australia.

In order to adjudicate between the two estimates, we refer to a new data set, gathered at a youth agency in suburban Melbourne in 1991. Approximately 1,400 young people used the service, including 225 homeless young people. This is the suburban agency data set.

Two Ways of Counting

There are two ways of counting the homeless population, and it is important not to confuse them. The first is a *census count* which gives the number of homeless people on a particular night. The second method examines the number of people who become homeless over a year. These counts are known as *cumulative annual totals*, and welfare agencies usually gather statistics in this way.

There is no simple relationship between the two approaches (Peroff 1987, p.35; Caton 1990, p.19), and a cumulative annual total may be many times larger than a census figure, if most people are homeless for a fairly short period of time. For example, if 40,000 people are homeless for 14 days in a given year, then a census count will reveal about 1,500 homeless young people on a typical night (40,000 x 14/365 = 1,500). This means that cumulative annual totals cannot be added to census estimates without falsely inflating the figures. Although census counts will usually be significantly lower than cumulative annual totals, they are of particular relevance to policy makers, because they give an indication of the demand for services on a daily basis. The Burdekin Report was concerned to estimate the numbers on a particular night, and this is our concern.

The 50,000 to 70,000 Estimate

There is an extensive literature on the difficulties of counting the homeless population (Rossi 1989, Ch.3; Wright 1989, Ch.2; Appelbaum 1990; Momeni 1990), and the main problems are widely recognised. Homeless people often move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another; there are continual changes in the size of the population as people move in and out of homelessness; and those who live on the streets 'have an interest in concealing the places where they sleep because they fear being harassed or victimised' (Peroff 1987, p.39). Fopp's response to these problems was to approach the issues indirectly,

using data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). His analysis is constructed around three main points, and it uses ABS data for February 1988.

First, he suggests that unemployed young people who are not members of a family are likely to become homeless, because unemployment benefits are not sufficient to enable them to achieve secure accommodation if they live apart from their family. The ABS publication, *Labour Force Status and Other Characteristics of Families*, provides information on young people aged 15-24 who are unemployed and 'not a family member'. This category is defined as people living alone or in a household where they are 'not related to any other member of the household in which they are living' (ABS Catalogue 6224.0). Table 3.1 shows that there were 41,400 young people in this category in February 1988. Fopp (1989a, p.360) argues that these young people are likely to experience 'acute difficulties acquiring and sustaining affordable and appropriate accommodation', and most of them are likely to be homeless. This is the core category in his analysis.

The second part of his argument concerns homeless children younger than 16 years of age. There are no appropriate ABS sources which provide information on this group, so he uses data from the National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH) survey of Youth Support Accommodation Program (YSAP) services which covers the period from July 1986 to June 1987, as well as

ble 3.1 Unemployed young people aged 15 - 24 and not a member of a family, 1986-88

Year	Age 15 - 19	Age 20 - 24	Total
June 1986	15,478	20,712	36,190
June 1987	14,390	23,995	38,385
February 1988	13,047	28,367	41,414

Source: Fopp (1989a, p360).

data from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) national client data collection. Fopp estimates that there were 8,500 12 to 15 year olds who were homeless (Fopp 1989a, p.365). When this figure is added to the 41,400 unemployed young people living away from their family, the total number of homeless young people is 49,900. He concludes:

> There are approximately 50,000 homeless young people aged 12-25 in Australia, consisting of 8,500 young people aged 12-15 who are homeless and 41,400 aged 15-24 who are homeless or 'at risk' of becoming homeless. (1989a, p.365).

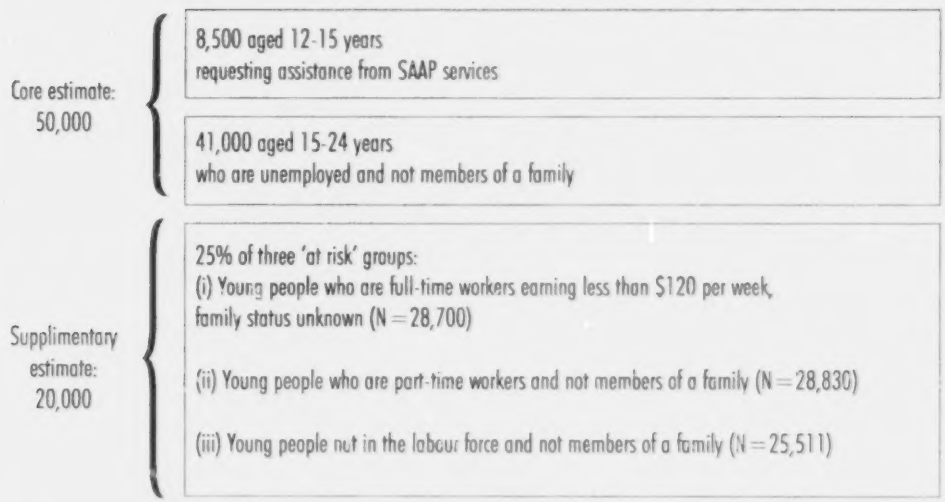
However, he notes:

> It is emphasised that this estimate understates the extent of the housing problems that young people experience. It should be regarded as an absolute minimum figure. (1989a, p.365)

The estimate of 50,000 homeless young people was a base line figure, and there could be more.

The third part of the argument concerns other groups of young people who are at risk of homelessness (1989a, pp.360-362 and 365). Here the focus is on three groups: young people on part-time wages who are not members of a family (28,830); full-time employed young people receiving wages below $120 per week (28,700); and young people who are not members of a family and are not in the labour force (25,511). The range above the base estimate of 50,000 is established by assuming that one quarter of these 83,000 are 'homeless or at risk' (1989a, p.365). It is not explained clearly how this decision is reached, but when the additional 20,750 are added to the core estimate of 50,000, this gives the figure of 70,000 which has been widely quoted in the press. Fopp's argument is summarised in Figure 3.1.

ure 3.1 Fopp's estimate of the number of homeless young people


Core estimate: 50,000
8,500 aged 12-15 years requesting assistance from SAAP services
41,000 aged 15-24 years who are unemployed and not members of a family
Supplimentary estimate: 20,000
25% of three 'at risk' groups:
(i) Young people who are full-time workers earning less than $120 per week, family status unknown (N = 28,700)
(ii) Young people who are part-time workers and not members of a family (N = 28,830)
(iii) Young people not in the labour force and not members of a family (N = 25,511)

Critique

Forty-one thousand young people aged 15-24

The core category in Fopp's analysis is 41,400 young people aged 15 to 24 who are unemployed and not members of a family (Figure 3.1). This is point in time data (a census count), and the information was obtained from the Labour Force Survey, analysed for family characteristics in February 1988. This is known as the Family Survey, and on technical grounds it is restricted to the 'usual residents of private dwellings' (ABS Catalogue No. 6224.0, p.43) The following people are excluded:

A) all persons enumerated in non-private dwellings (including hotels, motels, hospitals and other institutions)

B) persons enumerated as visitors to (rather than usual residents of) private dwellings

(ABS Catalogue No. 6224, p.43)

Thus the Family Survey excludes all those people who are usually recognised as homeless:

Tertiary homeless

1) people in boarding houses (under point A)

Secondary homeless

2) people in youth refuges, hostels and other forms of emergency accommodation (under point A)
3) people staying temporarily with friends or relatives (under point B)

Primary homeless

4) people on the streets or squatting in derelict buildings (they are excluded because it is a survey of dwellings)

All of the young people in Fopp's core group of 41,400 were classified by the ABS as the 'usual residents of private dwellings' at the time of the survey. They were not homeless. Table 3.2 shows that most of them were living in group households.

Table 3.2 Accommodation situation of unemployed youth aged 15 - 24 who are not 'members of a family', June1990 and June 1991

	June 1990 (N = 31,700)	June 1991 (N = 43,700)
	%	%
Living in a group household (flat or house)	82	84
Living alone (flat or house)	18	16
	100	100

Source: ABS, *Labour Force Statistics and Other Characteristics of Families*, Catalogue No. 6224.0.

Eight thousand five hundred children aged 12 to 15

This is the second group in Fopp's analysis. His argument involves three steps:

1) A NYCH survey of YSAP services reported 13,709 requests for assistance between July 1986 and June 1987. This is the base figure from which the estimate is constructed.
2) Supported Assistance Accommodation (SAAP) data is used to estimate the number of 12 to 15 year olds in the base figure (13,709), since the NYCH survey did not provide information on age. The SAAP figure is 23 per cent which Fopp uses to estimate that there were 3,153 12 to 15 year olds in the NYCH survey (13,709 x 23/100 = 3,153).
3) The NYCH survey had a 37 per cent response rate. He argues that if it had been a 100 per cent, then 'the number of referrals to YSAP agencies would have been approximately 37,051. 23% of this is 8,522'. (Fopp 1989a, p.365)

This is the basis of the estimate that there were 8,500 homeless 12 to 15 year olds.

There are a number of questionable assumptions in this procedure, but we will focus on one point. The estimate of 8,500 is a cumulative annual total (a count of homeless people over a 12 month period) 'between July 1986 and June 1987' (Fopp 1989a, p.365). However, Fopp's main estimate used ABS data focusing on February 1988 (a census count). It has already been explained that cumulative annual totals cannot be added to census counts without falsely inflating the figures. If the 8,500 were homeless for 60 days, it would add 1,400 to a census count (8,500 x 30/365 = 1,400); if they were homeless for 30 days, it would add 700 (8,500 x 30/365 = 700).

Twenty-five per cent of three 'at risk' groups

There were three additional groups of young people who Fopp believed were at serious risk of homelessness, comprising 83,000 individuals. Fopp estimated that 25 per cent of the 83,000 were

probably homeless. Two of these groups comprised:

(1) young people who are *part-time* workers and not members of a family (N=28,830 x 25/100 = 7,200 young people)

(2) young people *not in the labour* force and not members of a family (N=25,511 x 25/100 = 6,400 young people)

Both groups were identified in the ABS Family Survey which excludes homeless people. Most of them were living in group households. Those who were 'not in the labour force' were mainly university students. (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3 Main activity of young people aged 15 - 24 who are not in the labour force and not 'members of a family', June1990 and June 1991

	June 1990 (N = 52,300)	June 1991 (N = 66,900)
	%	%
Tertiary student	70	74
Secondary student	10	9
Other (including home duties, illness, moving house, travelling)	20	17
	100	100

Source: ABS, *Labour Force Survey*, (unpublished data).

The third at risk group was 'young people who are full time workers earning less than $120 per week' (28,700 x 25/100 = 7,200). In Chapter 2 it was shown that two per cent of the homeless clients at the city agency had a full-time job (Table 2.3), and we know that these young people return to secure accommodation fairly quickly. This group is not a major source of homeless people either.

Overall, there are no grounds for accepting the 70,000 estimate. Approximately 55,000 of the young people were the 'usual residents of private dwellings'.[1] Another 7,200 had full time jobs and were unlikely to become homeless. Finally, there were 8,500

[1]This includes: 41,000(core group) + 7,200 (part time workers) + 6,400 (not in labour force) = 55,000.

young people who were homeless, but this figure was calculated over a 12 month period.

However, the 50,000 to 70,000 figure was a major rhetorical success in the public debate. Ten years later, it is still being quoted (Department of Social Security 1995; Smith and O'Connor 1997).

Alternative

Our alternative method focuses on the proportion of the homeless population accommodated in Supported Assistance Accommodation Program (SAAP) services on census night. The SAAP program funds places in refuges, hostels, youth housing programs, emergency accommodation in large hostels (for a range of age groups), and services for families. The number of young people accommodated in SAAP services in Victoria is known from official census counts in May and November each year. The response rate for the SAAP data collection is usually over 80 per cent, and the data collection procedures are well established. Table 3.4 shows the number of persons aged 12 to 24 years on census night in May and November 1991, assuming a 100 per cent response rate. We will use the May 1991 figure of 1,092 as the base number from which to build the estimate.

le 3.4 Number of young people aged 12 - 24 in SAAP services, Victoria

Census date	Estimated number in SAAP assuming 100% response rate
May 1991	1,092
Nov 1991	1,104

Source: La Trobe University, SAAP data collection, (unpublished).

The SAAP figure is a reliable estimate of one segment of the homeless population in Victoria on census night. However, it does not cover young people who are living on the streets or in

squats; nor does it include those who are staying temporarily with friends or relatives; nor those who are using temporary accommodation outside of SAAP services. However, if we knew what proportion of the homeless population was in SAAP on census night, it would be possible to use the SAAP figure to estimate the total homeless population. There are four data sets which can be brought to bear on this issue. Two are based on the research at the city agency; the third is based on the data collected at the suburban youth centre; and the fourth is a census count by Stern (1991) of homeless young people in the Outer-Eastern region of Melbourne in March 1991.

When young people visited the agencies where we collected data, they were asked where they had stayed the previous night. We can calculate a minimum and maximum figure for those accommodated in SAAP services for each data set (Table 3.5). However, these percentages do not relate to the numbers in SAAP services on census night, but to estimates based on cumulative annual totals, and as explained before the two methods of counting cannot generally be used interchangeably. The three data sets provide information on where homeless people stayed on nearly 12,000 occasions, but they give only an indication of the proportion in SAAP services on census night. The research by Stern (1991) is important because it is a count on a particular night.

Table 3.5 compares the proportion in SAAP in each data set and there is an interesting pattern. The highest estimate of the proportion in SAAP is 33 per cent and the lowest is 20 per cent, but the most probable estimate is 22 per cent to 28 per cent, since this is consistent across all four data sets. The figures in Table 3.5 can be used to produce three national estimates of the homeless youth population. In each case we use the base figure of 1,092 in SAAP services in Victoria in May 1991, and we then scale up to a national figure that takes into account those outside of SAAP.

Table 3.6 shows that the maximum estimate of the homeless population is 21,000 and the minimum estimate is 12,750. When we use our preferred range of 22 per cent to 28 per cent, then the most realistic estimate is 15,000 to 19,000 homeless young people in May 1991.

ble 3.5 Four estimates of the proportion of homeless young people in SAAP services, 1990 and 1991

Data Set	Proportion in SAAP	
	Low estimate	High estimate
	%	%
The Deli, 1990 (N = 4,413 contacts)	22	28
The Deli, 1991 (N = 6,445 contacts)	22	26
Suburban agency, 1991 (N = 1,064 contacts)	20	23
Outer-Eastern Census, March 1991 (N = 137 individuals)	25	33

ble 3.6 Estimate of the homeless youth population aged 12 - 24, Australia, May 1991

	Proportion in SAAP	Estimated number of homeless youth[1]
	%	
Highest estimate	20	21,000
Best estimate	22 - 28	15,000 - 19,000
Lowest estimate	33	12,750

[1]The estimate is calculated from the number in SAAP (Victoria) scaled up to a national figure. For example, the highest estimate is 1,092 x 100/26 x 100/20 = 21,000.

This estimate can be checked. If we have made realistic assumptions about the percentage of the homeless population in SAAP services, then we should be able to use the same assumptions to predict the number of young people on Young Homeless Allowance (YHA) across Australia. In May 1991, there were 285

young people in SAAP services (census night) who were receiving YHA. Our calculations are based on our preferred range of 22 per cent to 28 per cent in SAAP. Table 3.7 shows that the predicted number of those on YHA across the country is between 3,914 and 4,982, and that the actual number was 4,465 according to Department of Social Security records at about the same time. This suggests that our assumptions about the proportion in SAAP are realistic. We conclude that there were between 15,000 and 19,000 homeless young people in May 1991.

Table 3.7 Predicted and actual number of young people on YHA, Australia, May 1991

Proportion of homeless population in SAAP services	Predicted No. on YHA	Actual No. on YHA*
%		
22	4,982	4,465
28	3,914	

*Source: Department of Social Security, (unpublished data).

How many of these young people were aged 12 to 18? Table 3.8 utilises information from four data sets which indicate that 57 per cent were in the younger age group. There were 8,500 to 10,800 homeless teenagers aged 12 to 18, and 6,500 to 8,200 young adults aged 19 to 24.

Table 3.8 Age range of homeless young people in SAAP accommodation on census night, November 1990 to May 1992

	Nov. 1990 (N = 4,269)	May 1991 (N = 3,025)	Nov. 1991 (N = 3,059)	May 1992 (N = 3,064)	Total (N = 13,417)
	%	%	%	%	%
Aged 12 - 18	57	56	57	57	57
Aged 19 - 24	43	44	43	43	43
	100	100	100	100	100

Source: One week SAAP census, (unpublished data).

The aim of this chapter has been a critical examination of the Burdekin Report's estimate of 20,000 to 25,000 homeless young people per night and Fopp's estimate of 50,000 to 70,000. We conclude that Fopp's method was flawed, and that the influential figure of 50,000 to 70,000 was an overestimate. The alternative figure of 20,000 to 25,000 by Commissioner Burdekin and his colleagues was more realistic, but it lay at the higher end of the range, rather than being a 'conservative minimum'. Our estimate of 15,000 to 19,000 for 1991 was not based on a narrow definition, because it included young people in all forms of temporary accommodation (including refuges, hostels, friends' places and other forms of emergency shelter), as well as those using boarding houses, and those living on the streets or squatting in derelict buildings. A lower estimate of youth homelessness is not usually big news, and the press showed little interest in the new finding.

CHAPTER 4

RUNAWAYS OR STREET KIDS?

It is reasonable to argue that any teenager or young adult who is homeless for more than a month has a serious problem and should be considered to be long-term homeless.

(Chamberlain, MacKenzie and Brown 1991, p.21)

The fieldwork at the Deli sensitised us to the variation in young people's experiences of homelessness. Some were homeless for a short period of time, whereas others were homeless for many months or years. Sorting out the issue of 'temporality' was one of the puzzles left after the evaluation was over.

The Burdekin Report drew attention to the fact that the homeless population is diverse (HREOC 1989, pp.43-44). It noted that some young people are temporarily detached from their families, but return home after a 'cooling off' period. Then, there are those who leave home, but who only require temporary assistance, before moving on to an independent living situation. Finally, there are the 'chronically' homeless:

> They are young people who, for whatever reason, are unable to move on to independent living situations. The reasons may include age, intellectual disability, emotional disturbance, poor education, inadequate living skills, and

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> extreme poverty ... although the chronically homeless are a disparate group, they share a profound alienation from society (HREOC 1989, p.44)

The Burdekin Report did not establish the proportion of the homeless population in each of the groups. However, Chapter 5 quoted many examples of young people who had very serious problems. There was a sub-text which gave journalists the impression that the chronically homeless are the largest group, and this is how the report was explained to the community.

Media accounts usually imply that young people experience 'years of homelessness':

> Stephen has lived a transient life since he was seven - in and out of foster homes and youth refuges. (*The Age*, 19 November 1991)

> Kim is 21 ... For six years the streets of inner Melbourne have been her home. (*The Weekend Australian*, 11-12 May 1991)

> Kelly, 17 ... has been on the streets since she was 10. (*The Sunday Sun*, 20 May 1990)

This will be called the *underclass* account of the homeless population, since it implies that most homeless young people have chronic problems.

However, there is a minority view which dissents from this position. In the American and British literature, a number of researchers have argued that there is a high turnover in the homeless population, and that 'many, perhaps most, of the homeless are so for a limited period of time, or they are homeless on an occasional or episodic basis' (Peroff 1987, p.44; Robertson 1991; Brandon, Wells, Francis and Ramsay 1980). In Australia, Murphy (1990, p.1) contends:

> Most runaways leave home with no real intention of staying away permanently. They find shelter with relatives or friends ... Most return home very quickly, the majority within a week ... Permanent runaways ... are the small minority - the ones who make the headlines.

Crago (1991, pp.26-27) puts it more bluntly:

> Some of the kids are' homeless' one week, back with their families the next. Many may be staying temporarily with friends after walking out of the family home ... Experienced workers agree that the number of 'hardcore' street kids is much smaller than the shifting group of 'temporary homeless'.

This will be called the *high turnover* account. It contends that most young people experience only short periods of homelessness.

The *underclass* account dominates in the mass media, but at the city agency we began to realise that some young people have only a short-term problem. This chapter evaluates the *underclass* and the *high turnover* accounts.

Theorising Temporal Concepts

The first task is to define 'short-term', 'long-term' and 'chronic' homelessness in a meaningful way. Previous studies have varied widely in how they have used terms such terms. For example, Rossi (1989) defines a short period of homelessness as up to three months, whereas Stefl (1987) and Roth and Bean (1986) comment that up to 12 months seems 'a relatively short-lived experience' (Stefl 1987, p.49). Such judgments appear to reflect different common sense assumptions, but they lack any cogent theoretical justification.

Our approach to theorising temporal concepts loosely follows phenomenological, ethnomethodological and symbolic interactionist theoretical traditions in sociology (Schutz 1976; Garfinkel 1984; Mead 1934; Weigert 1981). These contend that sociological concepts should reflect people's subjectively constructed understandings of everyday life. The core idea underpinning our analysis is that homelessness can be thought of as a 'time track' (Lyman and Scott 1989). A time track is an analytical construct which conceptualises how temporal periods are ordered by individuals or groups, so as to designate the beginning and end of

temporal sequences (Lyman and Scott 1989, p.49):

> Time tracks are products of cultural definition; they conceive of life as divided into temporally specific, qualitatively different events activities. Some of the time tracks are institutionalised so that knowledge of them is part of any socialised individual's taken-for-granted world.

According to Lyman and Scott (1989, p.35), people experience life as a complex network of time tracks, because 'social and cultural conventions carve out time segments from the raw, existential world'.

In order to understand what is a long or short period of homelessness, it is necessary to understand how the flow of time is measured on a given time track (Lyman and Scott 1989, pp.49-50). The flow of time can be assessed if we distinguish between 'clock time' and 'biographical time'.[1] Clock time is an objectively constructed measure of the flow of time, whereas biographical time records how clock time is subjectively experienced as an individual travels along the homeless time track. An example will illustrate what we mean.

Micky Sharpe, 16, came to the Deli for the first time on 3 March. A staff member recorded:

> Kicked out of home by mother after a very big argument. According to Mick, she started throwing things and called the police. Mick ran out. Apparently, the family often argues like this.

He was found one night's emergency accommodation and told to come back the next day:

> Rang Mick's father to see if he could stay there. Not on. Dad apparently has no room and also very angry about paying maintenance and various other things. Overnight at St Kilda Refuge. Will come in tomorrow to speak to Geoff about long-term accommodation options.

He returned on 7 March:

[1] This distinction is loosely based on Strauss (1987). Sorokin and Merton (1937) use the terms 'social' time and 'astronomical' time to make a similar distinction.

> Mick has stopped going to school. He feels that he can't handle it ...

On 12 March:

> Tried to speak with Mick about his accommodation situation, but it seems he's quickly become part of 'the scene', which is a bit sad. He's a nice kid ... Says he'll stay at a mate's place tonight.

On 18 March:

> Wanted food. Has been on the street for the last four nights. Attempted to discuss issues with Mick. Not interested. Left without a food parcel.

Our field notes for 22 March record:

> Mick is surrounded by five burly policemen in Flinders Street. He is being unusually restrained. 'I told you I don't live anywhere'. The policeman repeats the question. Mick's voice is getting louder, a hint of exasperation. 'I just told you. No fixed address'.

Mick has entered a time track where the biographical changes in his life have lead to the transformation of his personal identity. He left home on 2 March, but three weeks later, he is a person with 'no fixed address'. In what might appear to be a short period of clock time to many people, Micky has undergone biographical changes of considerable significance. Homeless young people often have an experiential roller-coaster ride during their first few weeks of homelessness (Visano 1990). If young people are out of home for three to four weeks, this usually signifies a major rift with their family, and that they will probably not return home on a continuing basis. We call this the *permanent break*. The concept is used in a metaphorical sense to denote a major transformation of personal identity. Our operational definition of this threshold is 28 days.

We can now explain what we mean by *short-term homelessness*. It refers to situations where young people leave home for at least one night, but the time track is terminated before the permanent

break. Family reconciliations usually occur within a few days of people leaving home, because parents who want their children to return normally calm down quickly once they realise that the young person has left, and they compromise to enable reconciliation. Similarly, young people who want to return home usually make this decision quickly once they confront the reality of homelessness. The operational definition of short-term homelessness will be from one to 14 days. There are, of course, young people who experience homelessness for 15 to 28 days. They are 'at risk' of the permanent break.

The second temporal concept is *chronic homelessness*. This denotes the adaption of young people into a sub-culture where homelessness has become a 'way of life' (Becker 1963, p.24). It is a category of biographical time because it relates to a transformation of personal identity, which is not necessarily tied to a given period of clock time. There are many factors which influence this process, and there is wide variation in the amount of clock time that it takes for young people to become chronically homeless. An example will illustrate some features of this lifestyle.

Maria Mercurio, 18, came to the city agency on 12 June 1990:

> ... needed accommodation ... Mum kicked her out two weeks ago. Has stayed with friends and been on the streets. I rang around the refuges. Finally got her in at Westernport (a refuge).

On 20 October 1990, a staff member recorded:

> Tried to get Maria into a refuge. Everywhere was full. Lots of places recognised her name. She seems to have done the rounds.

On 20 June 1991:

> Maria seems confused about the details of her life: how long she's been on the street; how many refuges she's been in, and which ones ... Gave her a voucher for The Eldorado (a boarding house), and told her to come back tomorrow.

The contact record for 27 December 1991 notes:

> Maria wanted to wash some clothes and needed food. Has been staying in a squat. She didn't request help with accommodation.

At some point during her period of homelessness, Maria has undergone two transformations of personal identity. First, she has made a permanent break from her family. Second, at a later stage, she has accepted homelessness as a way of life, and become part of the sub-culture of chronic homelessness. We call this the *transition to chronicity*.[2]

Young people who become chronically homeless often refer to themselves as 'streeties', and youth workers recognise that there is a distinctive street vernacular. These teenagers develop a complex range of street skills to get by, and many have an extensive practical knowledge of the welfare system. Itinerancy is common, and most of the time they no longer express a strong disposition to change their lifestyle. They have made the transition to chronicity and they have become deeply involved in the homeless sub-culture.[3]

The transition to chronicity is a category of biographical time describing a process of enculturation, but for our purposes it is necessary to have a clock time measure of this transition. In Maria's case, it appears that by 12 months she has become so used to living as a homeless person, that she no longer remembers when her homelessness started. The Burdekin Report also refers to people who have been homeless for more than a year as having a chronic problem. Thus, we use 12 months as a starting point for developing an operational measure of chronic homelessness.

The third temporal concept is *long-term homelessness*. This

[2]This term is derived from Costello (1991), Davis and Costello (1992), and Davis (1993). They refer to the culture of chronicity.

[3]Gordon Tait (1992, 1993) has argued that 'homeless youths do not have a "culture"' (1992, p16). Tait reports no fieldwork, but in the first article he refers to one empirical study: Wilson and Arnold (1986). In the second paper he refers to two: Wilson and Arnold (1986) and the Burdekin Report (1989). Tait arrives at his empirical conclusions on the basis of a predominantly theoretical discussion of Foucault. This is a novel way to understand the lives of disadvantaged young Australians. For a perceptive account of the sub-culture of chronically homeless youth, see Costello (1991)

refers to young people who have crossed the permanent break (28 days), but who do not become chronically homeless. Some of these young people participate in the homeless sub-culture, but after a while they want to exit from homelessness. Youth workers are aware of this, and they talk about young people becoming 'ready to help themselves'. Other young people remain marginal to the core homeless sub-culture. Although they make a permanent break, they do not accept homelessness as a way of life.

Sarah Miles is 17:

> Left home three weeks ago ... sexually abused by her step-father. He has been charged, but the court case isn't for a while ... he is on bail. Sarah has been staying at (a refuge).

A month later:

> Sarah has met two other girls who are staying at the same refuge. She thinks they will all settle down together. Sarah isn't happy with the idea of being on the streets ... Says she'll contact us again if things aren't working out with Donna and Kate. Says she doesn't want charity.

On 20 July:

> Made an appointment to see Clare tomorrow evening. Things haven't worked out with her friends.

Three weeks later:

> Sarah is still looking for long-term accommodation. Needs emergency accom in between. Referred her to Stopover (a refuge) for 48 hours.

On 2 October:

> Great news. Sarah has been accepted into Keilor Youth Housing Project. Will move in later this week.

We use the term *long-term homelessness* to refer to young people who have made the permanent break, but who do not make the

transition to chronicity. They typically experience some months of homelessness.

Our temporal model can now be summarised. There are two biographical transitions - the 'permanent break' and the 'transition to chronicity'; and there are three theorised temporal categories - 'short-term', 'long-term' and 'chronic' homelessness. They are categories of biographical time, but for the purposes of research they are operationally defined as 'up to two weeks' (short-term), 'some months of homelessness' (long-term), and 'more than 12 months' (chronic).

'Point in Time Dilemma'

It was possible to make a judgment about the length of homelessness experienced by 95 per cent of the young people at the suburban agency, and 92 per cent of those at the city service, using the 1991 data base. This assessment was made after people contacted the agency for the final time, but it is not necessarily when their period of homelessness ended. Some probably went to other services for assistance and some were probably itinerant. This means that our data must underestimate the length of homelessness in some cases, although it is difficult to assess by how much. This methodological problem will be called the 'point in time dilemma'. It denotes the fact that studies which attempt to assess people's length of homelessness at a particular point on the time track, do not necessarily record the total length of homelessness that they experience.

There is another aspect of the 'point in time dilemma' which is very important. If one counts the homeless population at a particular point in time, rather than over a 12 month period, it affects the proportion of the homeless population who will be categorised in different temporal categories. An example will show how this can make a big difference

If 500 people are homeless for one week in a given year, and 10

people are homeless for 12 months, then over the year (cumulative annual total) the short-term homeless outnumber the chronically homeless by 50 to one. However, a census profile will reveal that there are 10 people who are chronically homeless on census night (10 x 365/365 = 10), and 10 people who have a short-term problem (500 x 7/365 = 10). The chronically homeless are 50 per cent of the population in a census count, even though the short-termers outnumber them by 50 to one in a cumulative annual total. In terms of answering the question, 'What is a typical period of homelessness?', the answer in this case is 'short-term', but this only becomes apparent if the data are examined on an annual basis.[4]

The information for this chapter was gathered over a 12 month period, and the analysis will focus primarily on the data viewed in this way. However, for certain purposes it can be useful to look at the findings from a 'point in time' perspective, and this will be covered in the final section of the chapter.

Duration of Homelessness

The *underclass* account contends that most teenagers have a chronic problem, epitomised in media stereotypes about street kids. On the other hand, the *high turnover* account depicts most young people as homeless for only a short period of time. If the high turnover account is correct, then a majority of young people should be homeless for less than 15 days (short-term homelessness).

Table 4.1 shows that 24 per cent of the sample were recorded as homeless for up to 14 days; eight per cent were homeless for 15 to 28 days; and 68 per cent were homeless for a month or longer. It is also apparent that there are not marked differences between males and females, or between people in different age groups. At face value, this refutes the contention that most young people have a short-term problem.

[4] This point is rarely acknowledged in the literature. It is discussed in Freeman and Hall (1987), but it has not been recognised in the Australian research (Hirst 1989; O'Connor 1989; HREOC 1989). There is a good discussion in Jencks (1994, Ch.2).

ble 4.1 Duration of homelessness by age group and gender

	Aged 12 - 17		Aged 18 - 24		
	Male (N = 379)	Female (N = 279)	Male (N = 480)	Female (N = 170)	All (N = 1,308)
	%	%	%	%	%
1 - 14 days	25	26	22	27	24
15 - 28 days	10	8	7	6	8
1 month or longer	65	66	71	67	68
	100	100	100	100	100

ble 4.2 Duration of homelessness by agency

	Suburban Agency (N = 214)	Inner City Agency (N = 1,094)	All (N = 1,308)
	%	%	%
1 - 14 days	35	22	24
15 - 28 days	11	8	8
1 month or longer	54	70	68
	100	100	100

However, Table 4.2 shows that 35 per cent of those using the suburban agency were homeless for less than 15 days, compared with 22 per cent at the city service. It seems likely that if more suburban agencies had been represented in the sample, as well as some country services, then the number of young people with a short-term problem would have been closer to 35 per cent. In addition, if we estimate that half of those who were 'at risk of the permanent break' (15 to 28 days) were able to return home, then it raises the number of short-term homeless at the suburban agency to 40 per cent. However, we know that the information on

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duration underestimates in some cases, because the assessment was made when the person contacted the agency for the final time, which is not necessarily when their homelessness ended. Overall, we estimate that 30 to 40 per cent of all young people experience a short period of homelessness. This is a substantial minority, but it refutes the claim that most young people have a short-term problem.

What happens to those young people who are homeless for more than a month? Table 4.3 shows that the data do not fit either the high turnover image of the homeless population or the

Table 4.3 Duration of homelessness showing data in both empirical and theoretical categories, by agency

	Suburban agency (N = 214)		Inner City agency (N = 1,094)		
	%		%		
1 - 14 days	35	40	22	26	Short-term
15 - 28 days	11		8		
1 - 2 months	15	46	15	47	Permanent break
3 - 5 months	19		18		
6 - 8 months	6		10		Long-term (some months of homelessness)
9 - 11 months	3		3		
		14		27	
1 year or more	11		24		Chronic
	100		100		

underclass account. Three points about the data in Table 4.3 need to be emphasised. First, it has already been pointed out that a sizeable minority (30 to 40 per cent) of the homeless have a temporary problem, and most return home within a few days.

Second, Table 4.3 reveals that there are quite significant numbers in the three categories after the permanent break (one to two months, three to five months and six to eight months). We

believe that most of these young people experience some months of homelessness, but in the main they 'exit' before moving on to chronic homelessness. However, the number of people in the nine to 11 month category is much smaller. It seems likely that most of these teenagers will remain homeless for 12 months or longer. Therefore, at an operational level it makes sense to count people as chronically homeless from about nine months onwards.

Third, Table 4.3 shows that the main differences between the two agencies are at the extremes of the distribution. It appears that 40 per cent of the clients at the suburban agency have a short-term problem, compared with 26 per cent at the city agency. At the opposite extreme, 14 per cent of the suburban service users appear to be chronically homeless, compared with 27 per cent in the city. In contrast, the number of long-term homeless is between 45 and 50 per cent at both services.

A final judgment about the numbers in different temporal categories has to take into account that the findings at the suburban service may be more typical of the overall homeless population, and also that our method of collecting information underestimates the length of homelessness experienced by some people. On balance, we estimate that between 30 and 40 per cent of homeless people have a short-term problem (less than two weeks); that between 40 and 50 per cent are long-term (some months of homelessness); and that between 15 and 25 per cent are chronically homeless (more than one year).

Most young people do not experience chronic homelessness as the underclass model contends; nor are most people homeless for a short period of time as the high turnover account suggests. Rather, the homeless population is characterised by temporal diversity.

Explaining a Puzzle

If the underclass image is an inaccurate representation of the

homeless population, how do we explain the dominance of this account in the mass media, and its acceptance by many youth workers? The key to this puzzle is to re-examine the data from a 'point in time' perspective.

It was pointed out earlier that it is preferable to think about the temporal characteristics of the homeless population on an annual basis, because a 'point in time' count underestimates the proportion of the population who have a short-term problem. Nonetheless, it is useful to have a point in time assessment when planning services.

In order to use the data sets to estimate the temporal profile of the homeless population at a point in time, operational assumptions must be made about the length of homelessness experienced by people in different temporal categories. For youth recorded as homeless from one to 14 days, the assumption will be that their homelessness lasted for seven days; for those recorded as 15 to 28 days, the assumption will be that it lasted 21 days; for those recorded as one to two months, it will be 45 days, and so on. The proportions recorded in various temporal categories can then be used to estimate the number of person who have a short-term or long-term problem on census night. The procedure for this calculation is shown in Table 4.4. It uses the data for the city agency to carry out the analysis.

Table 4.4 shows that on census night one per cent of the population will have been homeless for up to 14 days, another one per cent will have been homeless for 15 to 28 days, 34 per cent will have been homeless for between one and eight months, and 64 per cent will have a chronic problem. However, it may be better to use the data gathered at the suburban agency to make the calculation, because this data set is probably more typical of the overall population. The calculation is shown in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 indicates that four per cent of the homeless population will have a short-term problem on census night,

ble 4.4 The use of annual data (total sample) to estimate the composition of the homeless population on census night

Duration of homelessness	N	Estimated No. of days homeless	N by number of days	% of population on census night	
1 - 14 days	319	7	2,233	1	
15 - 28 days	106	21	2,266	1	
1 - 2 months	191	45	8,595	5	
3 - 5 months	239	120	28,680	16	34
6 - 8 months	126	180	22,680	13	
9 - 11 months	39	270	10,530	6	
1 year or longer	288	365	105,120	58	64
	1,308		180,064	100	

ble 4.5 The use of annual data (suburban agency) to estimate the composition of the homeless population on census night

Duration of homelessness	N	Estimated No. of days homeless	N by number of days	% of population on census night	
1 - 14 days	74	7	518	3	
15 - 28 days	24	21	504	2	
1 - 2 months	33	45	1,485	7	
3 - 5 months	41	120	4,920	25	43
6 - 8 months	12	180	2,160	11	
9 - 11 months	6	270	1,620	8	
1 year or longer	24	365	8,760	44	52
	214		19,967	100	

roughly two-fifths have a long-term problem, and about half of the young people are chronically homeless. It makes only a modest difference when one uses the suburban data set to make the estimate.

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We can now explain the prevalence of the underclass account in the mass media and its widespread acceptance by many youth workers. On a typical night, most of the homeless population will have either a long-term or a chronic problem. These young people are more well-known to welfare workers than the short-term homeless, and they make many more demands on services. They are the cases of homelessness who are offered to journalists looking for stories, and they are the individuals who reporters are most likely to encounter in any cursory foray into the streets in search of homeless youth. Representatives from the welfare sector gave evidence to the Burdekin Inquiry which reflected the fact that on a daily basis they are dealing mainly with young people who have either long-term or chronic problems.

The Burdekin Commissioners faced a dilemma. They recognised the message coming from the field, but they had no reliable information on how many young people were in different temporal categories of the homeless population. Most witnesses quoted cases (not statistics), and the main research for the Inquiry was by O'Connor (1989) who did not draw attention to the fact that there are two ways of assessing the temporal dimension of homelessness (at a point in time or on an annual basis).

The Burdekin Commissioners compromised by accepting two contradictory positions. On the one hand, they stated that it was not known how many young people were in different temporal categories, but they produced a text which has been widely interpreted to show the existence of an underclass of homeless youth with chronic problems. Their discussion was suggestive of a more complex profile, but it missed certain important points which can now be clarified.

In any given year, there is a substantial number of young people who become homeless for a short period of time. They comprise between 30 and 40 per cent of the annual population,

but on a typical night they are no more than five per cent of the homeless. Another 40 to 50 per cent of the annual population have a long-term problem, but they 'exit' from homelessness after some months. Finally, there are the chronically homeless. They are about 20 per cent of the annual number, but on any given day they are about 55 per cent of all homeless young people. It is this group who dominate services and influence the thinking of many youth workers.

Conclusion

Temporality is a difficult issue and our empirical analysis has been complex. The decision about how to operationalise temporal concepts was made with reference to the notion of biographical time. This pays attention to how young people experience 'change' in a given period of clock time. The categories 'short-term', 'long-term' and 'chronic' homelessness are not arbitrary. They are grounded in knowledge gained during an extensive period of fieldwork, and they reflect the experiences of hundreds of homeless teenagers.

It has also been shown that the *underclass* account and the *high turnover* image do not adequately fit the temporal profile of the homeless population. Rather, the population is characterised by temporal diversity. About 30 to 40 per cent of young people experience a short period of homelessness, another 40 to 50 per cent have a long-term problem, and 15 to 25 per cent become chronically homeless. The idea that most homeless teenagers have a chronic problem is a stereotype.

Finally, the research on temporality alerts us to the fact that homelessness is most usefully thought of as a 'career' process (Becker 1963), or as a series of biographical transitions. This idea had a major impact on our thinking in the research that followed.

CHAPTER 5

HOMELESS SCHOOL STUDENTS

Early intervention is likely to be more effective than later intervention, and all initiatives which short circuit the 'career' processes towards chronic homelessness are worth considering. (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1994, pp.21-22)

The Burdekin Report (1989, pp.43-44) briefly drew attention to the fact that some young people only experience a short period of homelessness, but in practice the Report consolidated the public typification that most homeless young people are 'unemployed street kids' who are chronically homeless. However, the research on temporality was pushing us in a different direction, and we were becoming increasingly interested in the early stages of homelessness. How does homelessness begin? What is the process by which young people become street kids? When we examined the labour force characteristics of the homeless teenagers using the suburban agency, we found that 44 per cent of them were high school students. We began to wonder whether there might be more students in the homeless population than anyone had previously noticed.[1]

[1]There had been a number of studies of homeless school students in the late 1980s and early 1990s. See, for example: Lambert 1987; Maclean 1992; Morris and Blaskett 1992; Sykes 1993.

This chapter develops the argument that schools must be the primary sites for early intervention and prevention, where it is possible to take action before young people have become chronically homeless. The fundamental contention informing the analysis is that homelessness can be thought about as a 'career process' (Goffman 1961; Becker 1963; Snow and Anderson 1993; Hutson and Liddiard 1994), or as series of biographical transitions from one stage of the experiential process to another. The basic line of argument was laid down in the previous chapter.

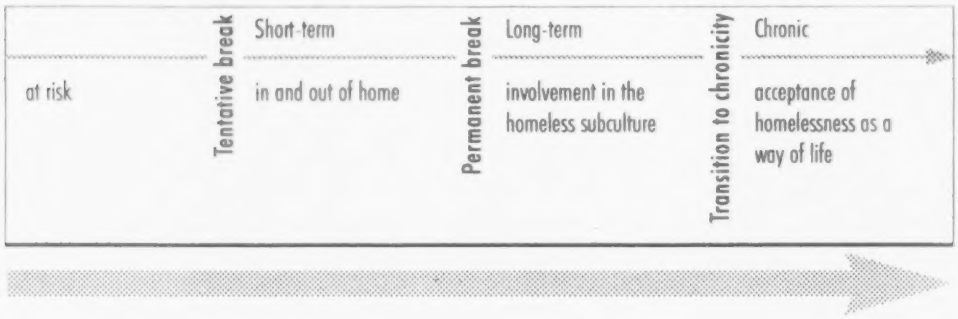
Homelessness as a 'Career' Process

In everyday language, the term 'career' is used to refer to an individual's progress along a particular occupational trajectory. However, sociologists use the term more broadly to refer to the temporal organisation of social life, and to the transitional stages involved in the development of any form of biographical identity. The idea of a 'homeless career' draws attention to the fact that people go through various stages before they develop a self-identity as a 'homeless person', and it 'calls attention to the factors that influence movement from one stage (of the career) to another' (Snow and Anderson 1993, p.273). The notion of a 'homeless career' is an ideal typical model which is used to order reality, so that the core characteristics of the temporal process can be seen more clearly, although young people negotiate the career trajectory in different ways. The ideal typical model identifies four stages in the homeless career and three biographical transitions (Figure 5.1).

The first phase is when young people become *at risk of homelessness*. The idea that young people are 'at risk' has been widely used in recent times (see: Batten and Russell 1995; Withers and Batten 1995), but it is a slippery concept which has been used in many different ways, and it is difficult to operationalise.

The first tangible indicator of homelessness is when young

ure 5.1 **Ideal-typical model of the homeless career**



people make a *tentative break* from home and family. This is the first biographical transition along the career trajectory. It is denoted by a young person leaving home for at least one night without their parents' permission. This is usually called 'runaway' behaviour, and most young people who run away stay temporarily with friends or relatives. Running away is a major biographical experience for most teenagers, and it can be made sense of in different ways. In some cases, it will be a once only experience and the young person will not run away again. In other cases the underlying family problems are not resolved, and some young people begin to move in and out of home.

This signals the second stage in the homeless career, and we refer to it as the *in and out stage*. One example is Kostas who is 15:

> The continuing saga of in home/out of home ... Kostas left home again last Friday after being back for nearly a month. Things are going badly wrong with his father again ...

Some young people move through the in and out stage quickly, whereas others remain in this phase for a sustained period of time.

The *permanent break* is the next biographical transition along the homeless career trajectory. This is a category of biographical time which signifies that the young person no longer thinks of him or herself as belonging to the family unit, and that he or she

is unlikely to return 'home' to live on a continuing basis. This concept is used in a metaphorical sense to denote a major transformation in a young person's sense of personal identity. Young people who make the permanent break usually have contact with the homeless sub-culture, although they can relate to it in different ways. Some young people get into the 'swing of things' very quickly, whereas others remain on the margins of the sub-culture.

The next biographical transformation is the *transition to chronicity*. This denotes the acceptance by young people of homelessness as a way of life. They often come to accept petty crime, substance abuse, drug dealing and prostitution as a normal part of life (O'Connor 1989; HREOC 1989; Hirst 1989). Experienced youth workers know that it is difficult to help young people who have made the transition to chronicity, because they no longer express a strong disposition to change their lifestyle.

The permanent break and the transition to chronicity are not fixed points along the homeless career path which can be chronologically measured. Rather, they are biographical transformations which are affected by a range of factors, including the age at which the young person leaves home, as well as what happens to him or her after making the permanent break. The transition to chronicity is often a drawn out process, and it can occur over widely varying periods of clock time.

In Chapter 4 we saw that the permanent break often takes place within two or three weeks of the young person leaving home, if he or she leaves school at about the same time. The permanent break takes longer, and is less clear cut, if the young person remains at school and connected to their local community through relationships with friends, teachers and other significant people in their lives. In these circumstances, the period of detachment from family may not signify a permanent break, and it is less likely that the young person will become involved in the homeless sub-culture.

If the number of homeless school students is substantial, then schools become potential sites for early intervention, where it is possible to take action before young people have made the transition to chronic homelessness (HREOC 1989, Ch.22; Sykes 1993, Ch.1 & 5). In June 1993, we undertook a pilot survey of student welfare coordinators in 120 Victorian secondary schools. It revealed many more homeless students than we expected. We decided to attempt a national census of homeless students in all government and Catholic secondary schools.

National Census

The national census was carried out in the final school week of May 1994. On Monday, 23 May we faxed a census form to all government and Catholic secondary schools across the country, asking the contact person to provide brief information on any homeless students in their school during the week 23-27 May, and to return the census on 30 May. Table 5.1 shows that 99 per cent of schools completed a census return (1,921 schools out of 1,948). We also carried out fieldwork in 100 schools. These were short visits to schools in all states and territories, in order to gain first hand knowledge about what was happening on the ground.

e 5.1 Response rate: All states and territories, Australia (%)

NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
98	98	98	100	99	99	100	100	99

For the purposes of the census, schools were asked to include young people as homeless, using the model outlined in Chapter 2. Our operational definition focused on young people in any form of temporary accommodation, including:

1) no accommodation (eg street, squat, car, tent etc)
2) temporary accommodation (with friends, relatives or moving around between various forms of temporary shelter)
3) emergency accommodation (refuge or crisis accommodation)
4) other longer term supported accommodation for homeless people (eg hostels, youth housing programs, transitional accommodation); and young people who were
5) living in single rooms in private boarding houses

In the pilot study, however, we found that a significant minority of schools provided returns which indicated that they also had homeless students who were living in shared households. Welfare staff told us that it is necessary to know that a young person has 'settled', before they should cease to be regarded as homeless. An experienced counsellor said: 'Often, you think you've got a young person settled, and a week later you find that they've moved again'. Welfare staff know from experience that shared households sometimes break down fairly quickly, and that independent students often require continuing support.

We decided that the census should take this into account. In the main study we gave the following instruction:

> It is not always easy to decide when homelessness begins and ends, and sometimes schools have to provide continuing assistance to young people after they have ceased to be actually homeless. Include these young people in your return if:
>
> a) they have been homeless within the last three months; and
>
> b) they are in need of continuing support

When we refer to the overall number of homeless students, we include young people who have moved into conventional accommodation, if the school believed that they were in need of continuing assistance. This is an operational definition based on our theorised model (Chapter 2), but it takes into account that homelessness is best understood as a process.

Using Local Knowledge

> I believe that the problem of counting the homeless population is, in a practical sense, intractable .... Take all results with a grain of salt: the stronger the claims of the study, the more the grains of salt. (Appelbaum 1990, p.13)
>
> ... homelessness is essentially unquantifiable ... (Hutson and Liddiard 1994, p.184)

As the quotations illustrate, there is a view in the American and British literature that it is impossible to produce reliable estimates of the homeless population. Therefore, it is necessary to explain in some detail how the census was carried out.

The census used a method based on collating 'local knowledge'. This is a diverse body of everyday knowledge that emerges naturally in communities such as schools. Teachers and students rarely quantify this experiential knowledge, but in most schools at least a few people will know if a young person is homeless. The young person may tell a friend, confide in their favourite teacher, or approach a welfare coordinator for help. Someone is likely to know when this happens. The census asked one person in each school to bring together this disparate local knowledge into a quantified estimate of the extent of homelessness in the last week of May.

Schools went about this in different ways, but we are certain that most schools took the issue seriously. Many counsellors telephoned us during census week. It was common for a staff member to be working with a list of students, and to have gone around the school consulting various persons (pastoral care teachers, year coordinators, the school counsellor, the staff in the school office, and so on). A number of people who rang made comments such as, 'I've nearly finished my research. I am just putting the figures together' (teacher, South Australia).

In other schools, the deputy principal and the welfare

coordinator sat down and made a list of all the cases they were aware of. Some schools put the issue on the agenda for a staff meeting, and each teacher was asked about the young people whom they taught. Finally, we had the opportunity to check the estimates when we carried out fieldwork.

In general, we are confident that the information from the schools is reliable, and that most schools had in mind actual individuals when they provided the information. Nonetheless, a minority of schools were worried about under-counting, and we will return to this issue after examining the main findings from the census.

Main Findings

Number of Homeless

The results from the research will be presented assuming a 100 per cent response rate with the figures rounded to the nearest 10. Table 5.2 shows that the census identified 10,440 homeless school students. There were just over 3,100 homeless school students in Victoria, about 2,900 in New South Wales, nearly 1,800 in Queensland, about 1,000 in South Australia, and almost 800 in Western Australia.

The prevalence of student homelessness in different states can only be compared after controlling for differences in population size. Table 5.2 shows the number of homeless students expressed as a rate per 1,000 of the school population. The total number of homeless school students is small in relation to the overall population (nine homeless school students per 1,000 of the school population), and there is some variation between the states. The rate is roughly similar in Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, Queensland and the ACT (about 10 homeless per 1,000 students), but somewhat lower in New South Wales and Western Australia (seven homeless per 1,000 students). These differences are minor, and the main point is that in all states the numbers are

ble 5.2 **Homeless school students: all states and territories, census week, May 23 - 27, 1994***

State	Number of homeless students	Rate per 1,000 school students
New South Wales (NSW)	2,910	7
Victoria (Vic)	3,140	11
Queensland (Qld)	1,760	9
South Australia (SA)	1,010	11
Western Australia (WA)	790	7
Tasmania (Tas)	380	10
Australian Capital Territory (ACT)	270	11
Northern Territory (NT)	180	14
	10,440	9

* Assuming 100 per cent response rate and rounded to the nearest 10.

low in relation to the overall school population.

There were significant gender differences in the population. We found that 56 per cent of the homeless school students were young women, whereas 57 per cent of those aged 12 to 18 at the city agency were young men. If the number of homeless unemployed teenagers is about the same as the number of homeless school students, then the gender balance will be about 50/50 in the overall population.

Table 5.3 shows that 61 per cent of schools reported homeless students in census week, but three-quarters (72 per cent) of these schools recorded less than 10. There were 39 per cent of schools with no homeless students, but a significant number of these schools reported that they had homeless students at other times:

> In the past we have had homeless students. We don't have any at the moment, but we get them occasionally. (Principal, Western Australia: census return 0)

> The number at this school fluctuates considerably. Last month we had four students who were homeless. They have since left. (High School, Western Sydney: census return 0)

It seems reasonable to suggest that as many as 70 to 80 per cent of schools probably encounter homeless students during the school year.

Table 5.3 Schools with different numbers of homeless students

Number of homeless students in census week	Proportion of schools in each category	Proportion of schools with homeless students in each category	
None	39	n.a.*	
1 - 4	27	44	72
5 - 9	17	28	
10 or more	17	28	
	100	100	

* not applicable

Between two-thirds and three-quarters of all schools in major urban areas reported homeless students in census week (Table 5.4). In cities such as Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Wollongong, Newcastle and Canberra, it probably means that over 80 per cent of schools encounter homeless students occasionally, although they will usually have only a small number at any point in time.

There are always more homeless students in government schools, compared with the Catholic system. Forty-six per cent of Catholic schools reported homeless students in census week. In contrast, 66 per cent of government schools recorded homeless teenagers, and about one-third of these schools had 10 or more. Table 5.5 shows that 92 per cent of all homeless students are in government schools.

ble 5.4 Proportion of schools reporting homeless students in census week: capital cities and regional centres

State	Capital	%	Regional centres	%
NSW	Sydney	73	Newcastle, Wollongong, Central Coast	85
Vic	Melbourne	77	Ballarat, Geelong, Bendigo, La Trobe Valley, Albury-Wodonga	71
Qld	Brisbane	64	Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, MacKay, Bundaberg	63
SA	Adelaide	80	Port Pirie, Whyalla, Port Augusta, Mount Gambier	75
WA	Perth	64		
Tas	Hobart	61	Launceston, Burnie, Devonport	81
ACT	Canberra	78		
NT	Darwin	71	Alice Springs	75

ble 5.5 Proportion of homeless students in government schools, all states and territories

NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
89	95	92	96	89	97	84	97	92

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Homeless young people were staying in four main places during census week and 810 students were without accommodation (Table 5.6). About 130 of these teenagers were recorded as 'on the streets' or squatting in derelict buildings. Another 680 were recorded as 'moving from place to place'. Some spent occasional nights on the streets, but most were moving frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another.

Table 5.6 Accommodation situation of homeless school students during census week

	Number	Percentage
No accommodation (including moving around)	810	8
Government supported accommodation (short-term or long-term, including community placement)	1,800	17
Temporary accommodation (mainly friends and relatives)	4,540	44
Recently homeless, still in need of continuing support	3,160	30
Boarding house	130	1
	10,440	100

There were 1,800 teenagers reported in government funded accommodation. About 650 of these young people were in longer term supported accommodation (hostels or youth housing programs). There were 500 teenagers in community placements, and 600 young people were in emergency accommodation.

There were just over 4,500 young people staying in other forms of temporary accommodation. About 2,400 were staying with friends, and just under 1,900 were staying temporarily with relatives. However, if these young people are homeless for more than a couple of weeks, they usually move frequently from one place to another:

> The kids will stay at a friend's place for a couple of weeks, then they wear

> out their welcome. So they might move to another friend for a week, and the same thing will happen again. Eventually, they run out of places to stay. So they drop out of school or leave the area. (High school, Perth)

Finally, there were 3,160 young people who had recently been homeless, but were in need of continuing support, and were attempting to remain at school. Just under 500 had recently been placed with foster parents; another 1,100 were boarding on a longer term basis with other families; and there were about 1,450 who were living in shared households.

Is the census figure accurate?

It has been pointed out that some schools were concerned about the information they supplied - there could be homeless students whom they did not know about. Significant under-counting is most likely to occur in schools with large enrolments and only a small number of welfare staff:

> This is a very large school on two campuses. I am sure that there are some that I don't know about. (Teacher, Victoria)

Senior secondary colleges (Years 11 and 12) also reported concern about their estimates:

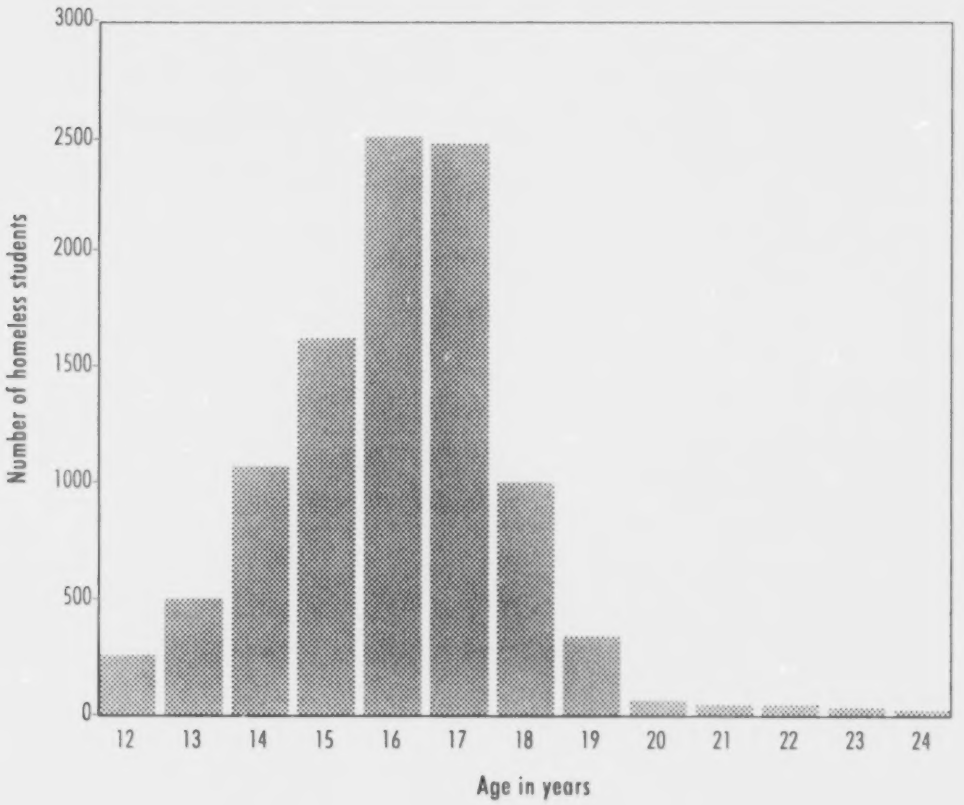
> Our information comes from students who approach us for support, but we see only the tip of the iceberg. There are others who don't approach us or just leave school. (Assistant principal, senior secondary college, Tasmania, enrolment 1,200)

This is the same problem of scale, but with an additional set of issues. Senior secondary colleges treat students as young adults. If students need assistance they are expected to ask for it. These colleges are less likely to identify cases of homelessness, because there is less personal attention and monitoring of students than in high schools. In addition, students in senior secondary colleges are usually 16 or 17. Figure 5.2 shows that homelessness is most

likely to occur when young people are in this age group. For these reasons welfare staff in senior secondary colleges often thought there were more cases in census week than they knew about.

Our fieldwork indicated that under-counting was not a major problem in most schools. We estimate that there was an under-count of between five per cent and 10 per cent overall. This means that a more accurate estimate of the total number of homeless students across the country during census week is 11,000 to 11,500.

Figure 5.2 **Age distribution of homeless students**



Surely there are Others?

Table 5.3 showed that 61 per cent of schools reported homeless students in census week, whereas 39 per cent recorded none. However, some schools with zero returns told us that they had homeless students at other times. Most of the schools that we visited during fieldwork also reported that they had new cases since the census. This varied from one or two new cases in about eight weeks in some high schools, through to three or four new cases per week in some senior secondary colleges:

> Spoke with the Deputy Principal (Stephen) and the counsellor (Joe). They recorded eight in census week. Five of them have since left. They get one or two new cases every couple of weeks. (High school, Queensland)

> Dave (the welfare coordinator) recorded 46 in census week. He had crossed off his list those who have since left (18), and added in the new cases in red (12). (Senior secondary college, Melbourne)

There are many more homeless students over a year than we recorded in census week. In almost all of the schools that we visited, welfare staff reported a steady trickle of new cases. On the basis of our field work, we think that the annual figure must be at least twice the census figure, and possibly three times that number. Our best estimate is 25,000 to 30,000 cases annually. This is not an empirical finding, but it is an informed estimate.

How Effective are Schools?

How effective are schools at assisting homeless students? When young people first leave home, they often need intensive counselling and support if they are to remain at school. If they cannot (or will not) return home, then they usually need help with accommodation, income and other practical issues. This is a lengthy process and many counsellors say that they can manage only one serious case at a time:

> A serious case will take up all my time for a few days. All I can do is say 'hello' to the others if I see them around. I sort of keep an eye on them. (Welfare coordinator, Victoria: census return 10)

> Seven or eight is a lot. One new case can take up most of my time for two or three days. (Counsellor, South Australia: census return 7)

In some states, school counsellors have full-time positions, but this is far from uniform, and in all states welfare staff are responsible for many issues other than homelessness. It is hard to say at what point the number of homeless students becomes too many for the school counsellor to handle. In part, it depends on the resilience of the person in charge of welfare, the number of serious cases at the time, and the other responsibilities that the welfare coordinator has. Our fieldwork indicates that most welfare staff cannot work effectively with a caseload of more than 10 homeless students at any one time.

We have already seen that most schools recorded fewer than 10 homeless students in census week. Table 5.7 shows that the average was 2.5 in schools with one to four cases, and 6.7 in schools with five to nine. If these schools operate effectively, it should be possible to deal with the problem of youth homelessness using existing resources. However, some schools are not effective at present. For example, 'West End' High School recorded six homeless students in census week. When we visited eight weeks later, the counsellor did not know what had happened to them. He had not written down their names, and he could not remember who they were. Many schools could assist homeless students more effectively, if there were better training for teachers and welfare staff.

Table 5.7 shows that 17 per cent of schools had 10 or more homeless students. On average, these schools had 21 homeless young people, and 67 per cent of all homeless students were in these schools. Schools with large numbers generally fall into two groups.

le 5.7 Extent of student homelessness in schools, census week 1994

Number of homeless students in census week	Average number of homeless students per school	Percentage of schools in each category	Percentage of all homeless students in each type of school
None	0*	39	0
1 - 4	2.5	27	12
5 - 9	6.7	17	21
10 or more	20.8	17	67
		100	100

*These schools recorded none in census week, but some schools have homeless students at other times. The number is probably low.

First, there are schools where welfare staff are doing their best, but they are overwhelmed by the size of the problem. An example is a senior secondary college in a capital city, where the welfare coordinator recorded 46 homeless students in census week. At this school staff donated tinned food to be distributed to homeless students, and the local bakery was donating unsold bread. The welfare coordinator was putting in a great deal of effort to assist these young people, but the number of homeless was so large that he only dealt with the most pressing cases. 'I cannot keep up with what happens to them. I lose young people all the time. There are always so many new cases to deal with. Sometimes it's almost too much to take'.

In about half of the schools which have more than 10 homeless students, the welfare staff are making a great deal of effort, but the size of the problem overwhelms them. They deal mainly with 'emergencies', because they do not have the resources to provide an adequate service.

In the other schools with more than 10 homeless students, senior staff and welfare coordinators appear to have become fatalistic. The Deputy Principal of a high school in a major regional centre said:

> Inadequate parents produce children who don't care and who can't cope. We're here to teach. This is not our responsibility. (Census return 30)

The welfare coordinator told us:

> Once they become homeless, it all goes down hill. They start coming late. They stop working. There's not much we can do.

She also said that she did not help students fill out applications for Austudy at the Homeless rate:

> They don't come to me. They know how to do it themselves. They probably find out from each other.

There was no effective pastoral care program in the school, and the Principal was ambivalent about welfare issues. Teachers in schools like this feel that they cannot change anything, and there is little point in trying. They make only a nominal effort to assist homeless teenagers.

Although there are some notable exceptions, in general schools with large numbers of homeless students do not operate effectively. Welfare staff are either overwhelmed by the problem of homelessness, or they have become resigned and fatalistic.

Conclusion

The census counted 10,440 homeless teenagers across all states and territories. There was some under-counting in a few schools, but when this is taken into account the best estimate is that there were 11,000 to 11,500 homeless school students in census week. The research also revealed a high level of turnover in the homeless population. There are probably about 25,000 to 30,000 school students who experience a period of homelessness each year.

This is an ongoing issue and most young people have their first experience of homelessness while they are at school. O'Connor (1989, p.14) found that three-quarters of the teenagers in his sample were aged 15 or younger when they first became homeless.

Crane and Brannock (1996, p.40) report that 90 per cent of their sample were 15 or younger. Our research also suggests that teenagers usually have their first experience homelessness while they are still at school.

Most homeless students are at an early stage in the career process, and it is much easier to help them at this point. If young people remain at school and located in their local community, then they will not become deeply involved in the homeless sub-culture. It is only when homeless students drop out of school and leave behind their local ties that they are likely to make the transition to chronicity. At this point, there is no longer an institutional setting where young people can be reached and the opportunity for early intervention has passed. Our fundamental point is that policies directed towards early intervention must focus primarily on schools.

Unfortunately, at present most schools report that homeless students drop out. This does not happen in every case, and some young people attempt to remain at school for some months before they give up their studies. Students who manage to get on to Austudy at the homeless rate stand a better chance of staying at school (Tasker 1995), but the drop out rate is still high. Overall, we estimate that between two-thirds and three-quarters of homeless students do not complete the school year. Many join the ranks of the homeless unemployed, and a significant minority make the transition to chronicity.

CHAPTER 6

YOUTH AT RISK

It is much easier to help young people in the early stages of the homeless career, before they have made a permanent break from home and family. At present schools are not good at providing appropriate assistance, and this is why many homeless students drop out. An effective early intervention strategy has to provide assistance to young people who are out of home, but it also has to provide support to students who are 'at risk' of becoming homeless. In both cases, it involves working with other family members as well as the young person, and the chances of success are greater if the student has not made a tentative break from home, or if they are in the 'in and out' stage. Chapter 5 established the number of homeless students in schools, but in order to think about the resources that schools might need, it is necessary to make a quantitative assessment of the 'at risk' population as well.

Understanding 'At Risk'

The idea that young people are 'at risk' has been widely used in recent times but it is an elusive concept which has been used in many different ways and for many different purposes (Dryfoos 1990; Carter 1993; Department of Employment, Education and Training 1994; Batten and Russell 1995; Withers and Batten

1995). Sometimes it has been used to refer to the likelihood of young people taking up harmful practices such as drug or alcohol abuse; in other contexts it has been used to refer to young people experiencing 'social disadvantage'; and sometimes it has not been clear what it refers to. After the census, we became interested in how experienced welfare professionals discern that young people might be 'at risk of homelessness'. This was the focus of our 1996 research, and our operational definition of 'at risk' is grounded in the first order experience of these workers.

When experienced welfare staff make a judgment that a young person is 'at risk' of homelessness, they usually take into account a range of things. They may give consideration to what the young person tells them about their family situation - for example, that they live in a re-formed family or with a single parent. They will probably take into account information provided by the student about the character of their family relationships - for instance, that they get on well with their mother, but not with their step-father. They will also consider the reasons why the young person came to see them at the time.

In some cases, the welfare teacher will also have information about how the young person is going at school. Perhaps their school work has started to deteriorate, or they have been getting into a lot of conflict with other students, or they have become 'withdrawn'. Sometimes, they will have anecdotal information provided by teachers, or they may have formed impressions of parents when they have met them on previous occasions. In daily welfare practice, then, experienced welfare teachers make the judgment that a young person could be 'at risk of homelessness' after taking into account a complex body of qualitative information. This is provided most directly by the young people themselves, but it is also gleaned from a range of contextual sources.

Our task was to design a survey to be filled out by secondary students in a classroom situation, which would identify young

people who might be at risk. In order to do this, it was necessary to operationalise the concept of 'at risk' in a simple way, and to develop questions that would be easily comprehensible to students from Years 7 to 12. In most cases where a young person is at risk, there is a serious problem in family relationships. Therefore, our survey included five questions which were designed to investigate aspects of a young person's situation at home. Each question was scored from zero (no risk) to two (at risk), and the scores were combined to create a scale from zero to 10.

The first question asked, 'Have you run away from home in the past 12 months? Running away is usually a sign of serious problems at home. A young person who had run away scored two, and those who had not run away scored zero. The second question asked young people whether they felt 'safe at home'. Everyone who did not feel safe scored two.

Two other questions asked young people to either agree or disagree with the following propositions: 'I get into a lot of conflict with my parents'; and 'I would like to move out of home soon'. In each case, 'agree' was scored two, 'unsure' was scored one, and 'disagree' was scored zero. In one sense, conflict between parents and children is relatively common, but it is probably not a good sign if a young person is in 'a lot of conflict' with parents. Similarly, 'wanting to move out of home' is normal as young people get older, but most students should not 'want to move out of home soon'.

Finally, we asked students to agree or disagree with the statement, 'I feel happy at home'. Disagree was scored two, mixed views was scored one, and agree was scored zero. A young person who was at risk on all questions could score a maximum of 10. Taken together, these five questions provide an indicator of current family circumstances.

Student Needs Survey

In order to make generalisations about the at risk population, it was necessary to carry out the survey in a broad cross-section of communities. The research was carried out during 1996, and the questions were part of a 'student needs' survey. Table 6.1 shows that 64 schools took part in the project across nine communities in five states. The total sample was 42,000.

Table 6.1 Sample size and number of schools in each area

	Victoria					NSW	Tas	Qld	SA	Total
	Country	Major regional city	Middle class	Trad. working class	New working class					
Sample size	4,113	5,275	5,092	4,177	6,613	5,269	5,674	4,642	1,123	41,978
No. of schools	9	6	8	9	8	8	8	6	2	64

In Victoria, the research was carried out in five contrasting areas. There were nine schools in country Victoria, six schools in a major regional city of 80,000 people, and eight schools in an affluent, middle class area of Melbourne. There were nine schools in a traditional working class part of Melbourne, and eight schools in a 'new' working class growth corridor on the outskirts of the city.

In New South Wales, there were eight schools in the research. They were in country towns and smaller regional centres. In Queensland, six schools were involved. Five were in Brisbane (two in the South, two in the North and one in the West), and there was one school on the Sunshine Coast. In Tasmania, eight senior secondary colleges (Year 11 and 12 students) took part in the project. Finally, the research included two schools in Adelaide's Northern corridor.

Youth At Risk

Table 6.2 shows that the most common score on the at risk scale was zero, and that 43 per cent of school students appeared to have no risk factors: they had not run away from home; they felt safe at home; they did not get into a lot of conflict with parents; they were happy at home; and they did not want to move out. A further 31 per cent of students scored one or two, and another 14 per cent scored three or four. Most school students (88 per cent) are not encountering serious difficulties in their family relationships.

However, Table 6.2 also shows that seven per cent of the sample scored either five or six. Amongst these young people, half (49 per cent) reported that they did not feel safe at home, three-quarters (72 per cent) reported a lot of conflict with parents, three-quarters (74 per cent) were either unhappy or ambivalent about home, and one quarter (23 per cent) reported having run away from home in the past 12 months. These young people are *possibly at risk*.

le 6.2 At risk scores of all students

	All students	
	%	
0	43	
1 or 2	31	88
3 or 4	14	
5 or 6	7	
7 or 8	4	5
9 or 10	1	
Total	100	

Another five per cent of the sample scored seven or more on the scale. Amongst this group of students, 89 per cent reported a lot of conflict with parents, 94 per cent felt either unhappy or ambivalent about home, 90 per cent did not feel safe, and slightly more than half (57 per cent) reported having run away. These young people were apparently experiencing serious difficulties with their families. We refer to these students as *most at risk*.

These findings can be thought about in two ways. First, at the level of welfare practice, they provide an indicator of those young people who might be at risk. This is important information, but it is necessary to remember that surveys elicit information about people's feelings at a particular point in time, and in some cases those feelings will change as time passes. At the level of welfare practice, then, the findings from the survey are best used to alert welfare staff to the possibility that a young person is experiencing difficulties at home. They will always need to investigate whether this is indicative of an ongoing crisis in someone's life, and to monitor what subsequently happens to them.

Second, the findings can be understood in terms of their relevance for making public policy decisions. For example, there will be a much greater need for resources in a community where 25 per cent of the young people are at risk, compared with one where the figure is two per cent.

One common assumption is that there will be a lot of variation between different communities. For example, it has been suggested that there will be fewer young people at risk in country areas and regional cities. Youth problems are supposed to be 'city problems', and this is where we should find a disproportionate share of the at risk population. Table 6.3 shows the percentage of young people in each community who scored five or more on the scale.

In country Victoria, the major regional city and in the middle class area of Melbourne, there were 11 per cent of school students who were potentially at risk. The figure was also 11 per cent in

e 6.3 Proportion of school students who are potentially at risk

	Victoria					NSW	Tas	Qld	SA	Total
	Country	Major regional city	Middle class	Trad. working class	New working class					
Score 5 or more	11	11	11	14	13	12	11	12	11	12

Tasmania and South Australia. In New South Wales and Queensland it was 12 per cent, and in the two working class communities it was 13 per cent and 14 per cent respectively. In each of the communities, there were some schools which had higher or lower figures than the average. Nonetheless, in 79 per cent of schools there were between 10 per cent and 14 per cent of the school population who were potentially at risk.

e 6.4 Proportion of school students who are most at risk

	Victoria					NSW	Tas	Qld	SA	Total
	Country	Major regional city	Middle class	Trad. working class	New working class					
Score 7 or more	4	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	5

Table 6.4 shows the number of young people in each community who were most at risk. In the middle class area, the two working class areas, and in New South Wales and Queensland, it was five per cent. In country Victoria, the major regional city, Tasmania and South Australia, it was four per cent. In 76 per cent of schools in the sample we found that between four per cent and six per cent of the school population were at serious risk. The main finding of the research is that the at risk population is spread evenly across all communities.

Another common assumption is that homeless young people are not doing very well at school, and that they will inevitably drop out. We found that 57 per cent of the at risk students get on well with most of their teachers; 67 per cent do not 'wag' school; 56 per cent do not get into a lot of trouble with their teachers; and 46 per cent think that their grades are either 'good' or 'excellent'. About half of the at risk students are doing very well at school. It is not a foregone conclusion that they will drop out.

Another one-third of the at risk students are getting average grades, and about one-fifth are doing badly at school. These students are getting into a lot of trouble (23 per cent), they are not getting on well with most teachers (20 per cent), they are 'wagging' school (20 per cent), and their grades are poor (13 per cent). If any of these young people become homeless, they are at serious risk of dropping out.

Higher Risk Groups

The number of young people at risk in different age groups is shown in Table 6.5. It rises from six per cent in Year 7, to nine per cent in Year 8, to roughly 13 per cent in Years 9 to 12. However, these figures hide a significant amount of variation between schools. For example, in one school in Victoria, at risk students were spread fairly evenly across Years 7 to 12; in another school in the same community at risk students were highest in Years 8 and 9; and in a third school the figure was highest in Year 10. Generally, the number of young people who are at risk is higher in the older age groups, but this conclusion hides a significant amount of variation between different schools.

Young people were asked about their ethnic identity. Just over three-quarters (76 per cent) of the sample identified as Anglo-Australian, two per cent identified as Aboriginal Australian, and one-fifth (22 per cent) were from other ethnic backgrounds. However, in the traditional working class area of Melbourne,70

le 6.5 Proportion of school students at risk in different year levels

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Total
Score 5 or more	6	10	13	15	13	13	12

per cent of students identified as coming from a non-English speaking background, as did 50 per cent in the 'new' working class growth corridor. This figure dropped to below eight per cent in the samples in Queensland, Tasmania, country New South Wales, country Victoria, and the major regional city.

However, Table 6.6 shows that Anglo-Australians and young people from non-English speaking backgrounds recorded identical scores on the at risk scale. Twelve per cent scored five or more, and five per cent scored seven or above. In contrast, 20 per cent of aboriginal students were at risk, including nine per cent who scored seven or more. Aboriginal students are a small percentage of the population in most communities, but they have a higher risk level than other students.

le 6.6 Risk level by ethnic background

	Anglo-Australian (N=30,514)	Non-English speaking background (N=8,652)	Aboriginal Australian (N=953)	Total* (N=40,119)
	%	%	%	%
All persons at risk (score 5 or more)	12	12	20	12
Most at risk (score 7 or more)	5	5	9	5

*Information on 96% of cases.

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Finally, we examine the gender breakdown of the at risk population. Teachers usually report that boys appear to be at more risk than girls. However, we found that 62 per cent of those at risk were female and 38 per cent were male, and there was little variation between different communities (Table 6.7). We think that teachers often identify boys as more at risk, because they use behavioural indicators such as 'disobedience' in class and 'acting out' behaviour. In contrast, our at risk indicator focused on young people's family relationships, which teachers usually know less about.

Table 6.7 Gender breakdown of students at risk (score 5 or more)

	Victoria					NSW	Tas	Qld	SA	Total
	Country	Major regional city	Middle class	Trad. working class	New working class					
Female	62	62	65	59	63	59	63	62	61	62
Male	38	38	35	41	37	41	37	38	39	38

Conclusion

On the basis of these findings, it is possible to make generalisations about the at risk population in most communities. In a typical city school with 1,000 students, there will probably be about 100 to 140 young people (10 to 14 per cent) who are possibly at risk at any point in time, and this will include 40 to 60 students (four to six per cent) who are seriously at risk. The latter group are likely to be experiencing major problems in family relationships. Most will not be happy at home, many will feel unsafe, and some will be running away. Roughly 60 per cent of these young people will be female, and Aboriginal students are more at risk than other teenagers. In a typical country school with 500 students, there will probably be 50 to 70 young people who are

potentially at risk, including 20 to 30 who appear to be in serious trouble at home.

Most (80 per cent) of the at risk students are not failing academically. More than half are doing well at school, and about one-third are getting average grades. It is not a foregone conclusion that these students will drop out of school if any of them become homeless. If competent welfare support is provided in a caring school environment, then their chances of staying at school are good. However, about one-fifth are doing badly at school. If any of them become homeless, they will need a lot of assistance and they are at serious risk of dropping out.

Of course, these figures will vary between schools. Nonetheless, the figures provide an indicator of the number of young people who are probably experiencing serious family difficulties at any point in time. These students will not all become homeless, although some of them are at serious risk. However, young people who are in trouble with their family are vulnerable to a range of other problems, and welfare staff report that the issues are entangled in everyday welfare practice. Many of the students who are 'at risk' might benefit from ongoing support and counselling. There is a need for an effective welfare infrastructure in all schools.

CHAPTER 7

Is homelessness increasing?

A big number suggests there is a big problem, one that demands our attention. Naturally, claims-makers favour big numbers because they make claims more persuasive. (Best 1989, p.2)

... one needs to distinguish between scientific numbers and political numbers. The distinction has nothing to do with accuracy. Scientific numbers are often wrong ... But scientific numbers are accompanied by enough documentation so you can tell who counted what, whereas political numbers are not. (Jencks 1994, p.3)

Numbers as Political Rhetoric

The Burdekin Report (1989) brought youth homelessness to a wide community audience in a way which no-one else has managed, either before or since. In the period of intense public interest which followed the release of *Our Homeless Children*, Dr Fopp's figure of 50,000 to 70,000 homeless young people was widely accepted as the best estimate of the homeless population on a typical night. Journalists treated it as an established 'fact', and it was widely quoted by advocates and other public figures. No-one recognised that it was fundamentally unsound (Chapter 3), and it became a central tenet in the rhetoric of claims making.

However, there were a number of 'local sceptics' who were

never really convinced that Fopp's estimate was right, because it was not consistent with their own field experience. They included some people working in government departments, a number of well known advocates, and some people who were working in services providing assistance to homeless youth. Few people questioned the figure publicly. In part, this was because the sceptics had no way of making an alternative estimate, and in part it was because few people understood how Fopp had arrived at his figure.[1] However, they were also reticent to criticise the estimate because they did not want to undermine Government action on youth homelessness.

Advocates usually assume that the bigger the number, the stronger the claim, and that a higher number puts more pressure on those in power to take action. Those who sympathise with them use a similar common sense logic. This is the 'politics of claims making' (Best 1989), or the use of 'numbers as political rhetoric' (Jencks 1994).

There is nothing unusual about claims makers preferring the highest estimate. Jencks (1994) has documented how this occurred in the United States. For a long time, advocates preferred Hombs and Snyder's (1982) estimate of between two and three million homeless, even though research indicated a figure of between 400,000 and 600,000 per night (Rossi 1989; Wright 1989; Burt and Cohen 1989; Jencks 1994).

In Australia, many advocates continued to use Fopp's figure after we had criticised it in the early 1990s, because they were concerned that our estimate of 15,000 to 19,000 homeless youth (compared with Fopp's 50,000 to 70,000 figure) would undermine the claim for resources. In fact, this did not happen, but it was reasonable for them to be worried about this. Generally, people continued to quote Fopp's figure, or to note simply that there were three estimates (Burdekin 1989, Fopp 1989a, MacKenzie and Chamberlain 1992), but to make no comment about the

[1] Fopp's (1989a) analysis was complicated which made it difficult for lay readers to assess the argument.

plausibility of the competing figures. There was a reluctance to jettison the 50,000 to 70,000 estimate, because it had been a major rhetorical success in the claims making process.

How to get the numbers up

In fact, there is a simple way to get the numbers up, without bending the rules of evidence. Chapter 3 pointed out that the homeless population can always be counted at a point in time (a 'census' count) or over a year (a 'cumulative annual total'), and the annual figure is almost invariably higher. An example will confirm this point. If 40,000 young Australians were homeless for six months last year (the cumulative annual total), then a census count would have revealed 20,000 homeless people (40,000 x 6/12 = 20,000). If one wants a higher figure, it is always preferable to count over a year.

As the annual figure increasingly diverges from the census figure, there is a sense in which homelessness becomes *less serious*, especially if the census figure is *low* and the cumulative annual total is *high*. Two simplified examples will explain this apparent paradox.

Let us suppose that 30,000 young Australians become homeless this year and all of them are homeless for 12 months. The cumulative annual total will be 30,000 and the census count will be 30,000 (30,000 x 12/12 = 30,000). This is a desperate situation where there are 30,000 chronically homeless young people who are part of an underclass from which they have little chance of escaping.

Now let us suppose that 520,000 young people experience homelessness this year, but each one returns to secure accommodation after one week. The annual total will be 520,000, but the census count will reveal 10,000 homeless teenagers (520,000 x 1/52 = 10,000) because most young people experience a short period of homelessness. At any point in time there will be fewer

young people requiring assistance than in the previous example (10,000 compared with 30,000), and it will be much easier to help them, because no-one has an intractable problem.

Advocates generally favour higher figures, because they believe that higher figures make for stronger claims. In some contexts, this is true. But in the case of the homeless population, the problem is always *more serious if*:

(1) the census count *increases* - because it means that the demand for resources on any night is greater; and

(2) the cumulative annual total *decreases* - because as the annual figure moves towards the census figure, so the proportion who are chronically homeless grows.

Conversely, the problem is always *less serious* if:

(1) the census count *decreases* - because the demand for resources on any night is smaller; and

(2) the cumulative annual total *rises dramatically* above the census count, so the number of people with a short-term problem increases.

The way to assess the seriousness of the situation is not simply to opt for the highest number possible. Rather, the key is to understand the relationship between the cumulative annual total and the census figure. Bearing this qualification in mind, we can now complete our estimates of the homeless population, and make some comparisons over time.

Benchmarks

There were 15,000 to 19,000 homeless young people on a typical night in May 1991 (Chapter 3), and the temporal characteristics of the homeless population at that time are known (Chapter 4). The two data sets can be combined to estimate the numbers in various temporal categories on census night. Table 7.1 shows that there were about 600 to 750 young people with a short-term problem on census night (up to two weeks). There were about

le 7.1 Estimated number in temporal categories on census night, 1991

Temporal category	Proportion in category[1]	Proportion used in calculation[2]	Estimated number in category[3]
	%	%	
Short-term	2 - 5	4	600 - 760
Long-term	34 - 43	40	6,000 - 7,600
Chronic	52 - 64	56	8,400 - 10,640

[1] From Tables 4.4 and 4.5.

[2] The figures in Table 4.5 are a better guide and this is taken into account.

[3] The number is calculated by multiplying the point in time figures (15,000 - 19,000) by the percentage in the temporal category. For example, the lower estimate for short term is 15,000 x 4/100 = 600.

6,000 to 7,500 who had a long-term problem (some months of homelessness); and there were between 8,000 and 11,000 chronically homeless young people.

The number of young people who experienced homelessness during 1991 can also be estimated. There were 8,000 to 11,000 chronically homeless young people in May 1991 (Table7.1), and they were about 20 per cent of the annual population (Table 4.3). Therefore, between 40,000 and 55,000 young Australians experienced homelessness that year (8,000 x 100/20 = 40,000; 11,000 x 100/20 = 55,000).

Table 7.2 shows that 14,000 to 19,000 of these young people had a short-term problem (up to two weeks); 18,000 to 25,000 had a long-term problem (some months of homelessness); and 8,000 to 11,000 were chronically homeless. The cumulative annual total (40,000 to 55,000) was significantly above the census count (15,000 to 19,000), because the annual figure includes young people who have a short-term problem (up to two weeks) and young people who experience some months of homelessness (a long-term problem).

If the cumulative annual total had been 500,000, nearly every-

Table 7.2 Estimated number in temporal categories for annual homeless population, 1991

Temporal category	Proportion in category[1]	Average used in calculation	Estimated number[2]
	%	%	
Short-term	30 - 40	35	14,000 - 19,250
Long-term	40 - 50	45	18,000 - 24,750
Chronic	15 - 25	20	8,000 - 11,000

[1] From Tables 4.3.

[2] The number is calculated by multiplying the annual total (40,000 - 55,000) by the percentage in the temporal category. For example, the lower estimate for short-term is 40,000 x 35/100 = 14,000.

one would have had a short-term problem, possibly lasting a week or so. The situation is more serious than that because the annual figure is *lower*. About two-thirds of those who were homeless in 1991 had either a chronic or a long term problem. It is more difficult to help these young people because they usually have a range of issues to solve.

Is Homelessness Increasing?

We can now make the same estimates for 1994. The national census of homeless school students identified 11,000 to 11,500 homeless teenagers in census week, and we can work from this once we make a simple adjustment. The census used a *service delivery* definition of homelessness which included young people who were attempting to return to secure accommodation. The 1991 estimates used the *cultural* definition, based on 'shared community standards' (Chapter 2), and we have to revert to that definition when we make the 1994 estimates. This is easy. Table 5.6 showed that 70 per cent of the young people identified in the census were homeless using the cultural definition. Therefore, our benchmark figure is 11,000 x 70/100 = 7,700 homeless young people.

Census count

The base figure of 7,700 can be used to make two calculations about the homeless population in 1994: the number of homeless young people aged 12 to 18; and the number in the age group 12 to 24.

The school census was carried out in the same week as the 1994 census of people using Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services. This data set provides the best indicator that we have of the proportion of school students in the overall homeless population aged 12 to 18. Table 7.3 shows that the figure was 36.5 per cent.[2] Using this information, we calculate that there were 21,000 homeless young people aged 12 to 18 in May 1994 (7,700 x 100/36.5 = 21,000). This included 7,700 school students, about 1,200 other students (mainly TAFE), and 12,000 young people who were mainly unemployed or outside of the labour force.

We also want to know the number of homeless young people aged 12 to 24 in census week. Since we know that there were 21,000 aged 12 to 18, we can calculate the overall figure once we

le 7.3 Characteristics of young people aged 12 - 18 in SAAP census, May 26 1994 and estimate of number in homeless population

	Proportion in SAAP	Number of homeless youth*
	%	
School student	36.5	7,700
TAFE student	5.5	1,200
Unemployed (including not in the labour force)	57.0	12,000
Other	1.0	200
	100	21,000

*The number of homeless school students is known. The best estimate of the total number of homeless aged 12 - 18 is 7,700 x 100/36.5 = 21,000

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[2]Young people aged 16 to 17 who receive Austudy at the homeless rate are also about one third of all young people in that age group who receive a Commonwealth benefit for homelessness. This corroborates the census figure of 36.5 per cent.

Table 7.4 Age range of homeless young people in SAAP accommodation on census night, May 1993 to November 1994

	May 1993 (N=3,468)	Nov. 1993 (N=3,090)	May 1994 (N=3,186)	Nov. 1994 (N=2,787)	Total (N=12,531)
	%	%	%	%	%
Aged 12 - 18	58	56	56	56	57
Aged 19 - 24	42	44	44	44	43
	100	100	100	100	100

Source: One week SAAP census, (unpublished data).

know what proportion are in the age range 12 to 18. Table 7.4 uses SAAP census data from 1993 and 1994 to make this estimate. It shows that young people aged 12 to 18 were consistently just below 60 per cent of the homeless population (aged 12 to 24). Therefore, there were approximately 37,000 homeless youth aged 12 to 24 in May 1994 (21,000 x 100/57 = 37,000).

Cumulative annual total

The number of cases over a year will always be more than the number of cases in a census count, and the relationship between the two figures is mediated by the temporal profile of the population. Table 7.5 compares the temporal profile of the city agency clients in 1991 with the temporal profile of clients using SAAP between July and December 1996. The temporal profile of the two groups is similar. This means that the census figure in 1994 is probably linked to the cumulative annual total in the same way that the two figures were linked in 1991.

In 1991, the census estimate was 15,000 to 19,000, and the cumulative annual total was 40,000 to 55,000. The ratio was 2.66 to 2.9 (40,000/15,000 = 2.66; 55,000/19,000 = 2.9). The census estimate in 1994 is 37,000. If we use the same ratio, then the

le 7.5 Temporal profile of homeless youth aged 12 - 24 using The Deli (1991) compared with those using SAAP services (July - December 1996)

Duration of homelessness	The Deli, 1991 (N = 1,094)	SAAP services, 1996* (N = 4,201)
	%	%
Up to 4 weeks	30	30
1 - 11 months	46	43
1 year or longer	24	27
	100	100

*Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (1997, p.36). The figures have been recalculated.

le 7.6 Estimated number in temporal categories for the annual homeless population, 1994

Temporal category	Proportion in category	Estimated number*
	%	
Short-term	30 - 40	30,000 - 40,000
Long-term	40 - 50	40,000 - 50,000
Chronic	15 - 25	15,000 - 25,000

*The estimate is calculated by multiplying the annual total (100,000) by the percentage in the temporal category. for example, the lower estimate for short-term is 100,000 x 30/100 = 30,000.

cumulative annual total in 1994 was 98,000 to 110,000 (37,000 x 2.66 = 98,000; 37,000 x 2.9 = 110,000). We conclude that about 100,000 young people experienced homelessness in 1994.

Since the temporal profile of the population appears not to have changed between 1991 and 1996, we can use the same figures to estimate the number who had a long-term, short-term and chronic problem. Table 7.6 shows that 30,000 to 40,000 had a short-term problem, 40,000 to 50,000 had a long-term problem, and about 20,000 were chronically homeless.

Yes, it is Getting Worse

Table 7.7 compares the estimates for 1991 and 1994. The youth homeless population (aged 12 to 24) increased from 15,000 to 19,000 in May 1991 to 37,000 in May 1994. Over the same period, the number of homeless young people aged 12 to 18 increased from 8,500 to 10,800 (May 1991) to 21,000 (May 1994). The number of young people aged 16 to 17 on Young Homeless Allowance also doubled from 4,500 to 9,900. Finally, over the year, the homeless population (aged 12 to 24) increased from 40,000 to 55,000 in 1991 to 100,000 in 1994.

Table 7.7 Number of homeless young people, 1991 and 1994

	Census estimate, May 1991	Census estimate May 1994	Ratio
Number of homeless aged 12 - 24	15,000 - 19,000	37,000	1.95 - 2.5
Number of homeless aged 12 - 18	8,500 - 10,800	21,000	1.95 - 2.5
YHA beneficiaries	4,464	9,884	2.2
	Annual estimate 1991	Annual estimate 1994	Ratio
Number of homeless aged 12 - 24	40,000 - 55,000	98,000 - 110,000	1.8 - 2.75

In this case, the increase in the cumulative annual total does *not* reflect an improvement in the situation - because it was accompanied by a sharp rise in the census count. Had the cumulative annual total increased to 100,000 and the census count *declined* to 8,000, then it would have meant that there were many more short-term homeless in the population. Instead, the cumulative annual total doubled to 100,000, but the proportion with a short-term problem remained at about 35 per cent, so the census count doubled as well. The situation got worse because there were

now 37,000 homeless young people on a typical night, compared with 15,000 to 19,000 a few years earlier.

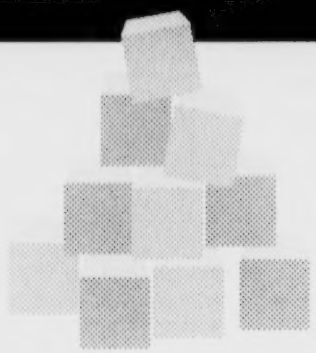
Youth homelessness doubled between 1991 and 1994, but this rate of increase is probably exceptional during a period of deep economic recession, and it should not be assumed that the population is doubling every three years. Nonetheless, youth homelessness is likely to remain a major problem well into the 21st century.

Part 2

Early Intervention & Prevention

CHAPTER 8

KNOWLEDGE BASE FOR POLICY



The following ten points attempt to summarise some of what we have learnt about early intervention and prevention. Our thoughts have taken shape through extensive fieldwork and we have benefited from the experience and practice wisdom of many people at all levels.

Defining Early Intervention and Prevention

Point 1: 'Early intervention refers to measures to help young people as soon as possible after they become homeless. Preventative strategies include: individual support for young people who are perceptibly at risk; school strategies directed towards all young people; and strategies focusing on groups with higher risk levels.'

The key idea underpinning the argument for early intervention and prevention is that homelessness is best understood as a 'career' process, or a series of transitions from one stage of the process to another. Early intervention and prevention are points for intervention along this continuum of experience.

Early intervention refers to measures taken as soon as possible after a young person becomes homeless - at the beginning of the

homeless career. Preventative strategies focus on young people who have not made a tentative break from home. They include: individual support for young people who are perceptibly at risk; school strategies which are directed towards all young people; and group strategies which target students with higher risk levels.

The distinction between 'early intervention' and 'prevention' may become somewhat blurred in individual cases. Some young people run away from home many times before they detach and do not return, whereas others are evidently 'at risk' even though they may not have run away. In everyday practice, welfare professionals have to take into account the complex nature of this transition, and sometimes they use the terms 'early intervention' and 'prevention' loosely.

Full-Service Schools

Point 2: 'Schools must embrace a broad responsibility for the education and welfare of young people in the 21st century and become full-service schools. Student support and welfare have to become a secure part of the curriculum and schools must work closely with community agencies.'

Schools have a vital role to play in a national early intervention and prevention strategy, because most young people have their first experience of homelessness while they are still at school. The Burdekin Report (1989, p.271) portrayed schools as unsympathetic to homeless youth, although it recommended that schools should play a more positive role. The institutional practices of schools are part of the problem, but at the same time schools are essential to the solution.

Joy Dryfoos (1990 and 1994) has argued that schools of the future must be 'full-service schools'. Dryfoos contends that the deteriorating social environment in many American cities means that young people now face substantial barriers to growing into

responsible adults. She suggests that many inner urban youth are ill equipped to enter the workforce, become effective parents, and participate in the political process (Dryfoos 1990). She refers to the 'new morbidities' - unprotected sex, drugs, violence and depression - which threaten the future of young people:

> ... about one in four children and youth (aged 10 to 17) in the United States "do it all" - use drugs, have early unprotected intercourse, are truant, and fall far behind in school - and as a result, these seven million young people will never be able to make it without massive changes in their current circumstances. (Dryfoos 1994, p.3)

Dryfoos argues that the challenge for schools in the 21st century is to take on a much broader responsibility for the education and welfare of young people, and to provide an array of integrated support services that respond to the declining welfare of many American families. These will be *full-service schools* which involve the coupling of traditional educational facilities with an extensive range of other services that young people and families might need:

> The vision of the full-service school puts the best of school reform together with all other services that children, youth, and their families need, most of which can be located in a school building. The educational mandate places responsibility on the school system to reorganise and innovate. The charge to community agencies is to bring into the school: health, mental health, employment services, child care, parent education, case management, recreation, cultural events, welfare, community policing, and whatever else may fit into the picture. (Dryfoos 1994, p.12)

The result would be a new kind of 'seamless' institution, which brings together a complex array of educational, recreational and welfare services that young people and their families might need, offering maximum accessibility.

There are only a small number of schools attempting this in

the United States, but Dryfoos's model has attracted considerable interest in Australia (Australian Centre for Equity through Education 1996 and 1977), because of its vision of schools as a place where young people can access a range of services that they might need. However, there are two problems with the American model.

First, it would be prohibitively expensive to adopt it in most Australian cities, because it implies that nearly all schools would have to be rebuilt. Second, the model is best suited to high density cities where most people are close to the service delivery point. Australian cities have extensive suburbs, and the clustering of services in one place would not be practical in most cases.

The vision underpinning full-service schools is a good one, but the practical application of the model has to be translated to fit Australian conditions. Full-service schools will have a secure welfare infrastructure and strong links with local community agencies, but this will not mean the co-location of all services.

Proactive or Reactive?

Point 3: 'Early intervention should be proactive as well as reactive, not just waiting until young people in need ask for help.'

Early intervention should be proactive as well as reactive, not just waiting until young people in need ask for help, but actively reaching out to those where there are indicators of serious risk. A proactive approach to early intervention offers assistance to young people as soon as it becomes apparent that they have made a tentative break from home and family, and it also offers assistance to students who are perceptibly at risk of homelessness. The strategy must include:

(1) *Identification of those in need* - without this there cannot be

proactive intervention.

(2) *Effective procedures* - young people have to be approached sensitively and staff will need appropriate training. There have to be school protocols about early intervention; labelling must be avoided; and there need to be procedures for ensuring confidentiality.

(3) *Assessment of need* - welfare workers must be able to accurately assess the needs of the young person. How should the family be approached? Can the young person be swiftly reunited with family members or will they require accommodation? Are they coping with school at present? Do they seem likely to drop out of school?

(4) *Links with community services* - school counsellors must have detailed knowledge of what services are available in their community; they will often need to help young people access those services, and some teenagers may need assistance to move between agencies.

(5) *Support programs in school* - these may involve individual counselling sessions; sometimes groups of young people with a similar issue can be brought together to form a support group; ongoing support is often required.

(6) *Monitoring outcomes* - after an initial crisis has been resolved, regular contact with a young person to monitor their progress is often needed.

However, some people argue against a proactive approach to early intervention and prevention on the grounds that it could involve 'labelling' young people. According to Crane and Brannock (1996, p.104):

> identifying students who are at risk and targeting specific strategies at these students is problematic ... (It) will run the danger of labelling and stereotyping students ... At risk strategies, if employed, should focus on self-identification ...

In melodramatic language, they warn against 'the ethical and

dubious quagmire of diagnostic techniques to identify the at risk young people' (1996, p.104). They endorse only a *reactive approach* to early intervention which provides assistance to young people who ask for help. They say that this upholds young people's rights.

Crane and Brannock are well intentioned, but they have not thought through the implications of their argument. It is common for young people who are at serious risk not to seek help. Schools often report that homeless students first come to their attention when they are leaving. By this time it is usually too late to provide effective assistance. Similarly, teachers often report that boys are more likely to be at risk than girls, but we know from the at risk survey that young women are more likely to be at risk than young men. Some teenagers who are undergoing a crisis at home engage in 'acting out' behaviour at school, and this brings them to the attention of teachers. Others become quiet and withdrawn, and they come to the attention of no-one.

Crane and Brannock are right to point out that is important not to label young people, but the implication of their point is that there must be appropriate procedures in place to avoid 'labelling'. They are wrong to suggest that it means one should only provides assistance to those who ask for help, because this will leave many young people without assistance. Homeless teenagers' rights are safeguarded by ethical practices, not by leaving them to fend for themselves.

Both Early Intervention and Prevention

Point 4: 'A comprehensive approach for homeless youth and teenagers at risk will include both early intervention and prevention strategies. Early intervention is the starting point and the basis for extending to preventative initiatives. Prevention on its own is usually ineffectual.'

A comprehensive approach to early intervention will include the development of preventative strategies in schools. Preventative strategies focus on young people before the tentative break. They include: *school strategies* which are directed towards all young people (most of whom will never become homeless); *group strategies* which are directed towards groups who are thought to have higher risk levels; and *individual strategies* which target young people who are perceptibly at risk.

A school strategy might be a strong pastoral care system, or an educational program which allows young people to discuss personal issues in a supportive environment. Group strategies focus on young people who are thought to have higher levels of risk, but who are not actually homeless. The identification of these groups is done as unobtrusively as possible in the school, and special programs are tailored to the interests of particular groups. Preventative strategies are typically about young people taking part in enjoyable activities, and the building of positive relationships with teachers and other students. They are not about individuals confronting homelessness.

This is the main reason why broad preventative strategies cannot be a replacement for early intervention. Schools which focus exclusively on prevention will not have the procedures in place to assist students who are actually homeless. Preventative strategies complement early intervention. They do not replace it.

Despite this, some community workers and teachers favour prevention rather than early intervention - after all, isn't it better to prevent youth homelessness rather than respond to it after it has occurred? This line of thinking has a certain intuitive plausibility, and it informed the Brotherhood of St. Laurence's major project on *the Prevention of Youth Homelessness* (Charman, McClelland, Montague and Sully 1997).

This well known project was initiated by Professor Jan Carter when she was Head of the Brotherhood's Social Policy and

Research division. Professor Carter was one of the two commissioners who assisted Brian Burdekin with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry into youth homelessness in 1988. The Brotherhood project drew together a large body of funds from philanthropic foundations and government to work in Ballarat and Dandenong between 1992 and 1997.[1]

The project aimed to explore ways to prevent youth homelessness using 'an action research approach within a community development framework'. It did not work directly with homeless young people and the focus was exclusively on prevention. The project encountered many practical difficulties, and after three years there was a major restructure. The operation in Dandenong was closed, and it was decided to concentrate on work in Ballarat.

The Brotherhood project set out to 'strengthen the attachment and links of young people to adults outside their family of origin' (Carter 1993, p.139). It primarily took on a community development focus which involved working with other agencies in the field, or involved projects which improved the quality of life for young people. Some of the projects included:

(a) peer mediation training for students in a secondary school
(b) work towards a parent advocacy and support program
(c) an evaluation of the Student at Risk (STAR) program in one school
(d) assisting another organisation with the review of their parent/adolescent program
(e) work with general practitioners to improve their capacity to work more effectively with young people
(f) support to non-offending parents in situations of family violence
(g) co-facilitation of a parent support group in a neighbourhood centre
(h) a project with school students on alternative behaviour to violence

Many of these projects were intrinsically worthwhile. Howev-

[1] Before the project started, Professor Carter left the Brotherhood to take up an academic appointment.

er, the researchers had no way of knowing whether any of the young people who took part were actually at risk of homelessness. Moreover, they had no way of knowing whether any of the programs actually prevented any young people from becoming homeless. The final report concluded:

> ... determining the extent to which the Project (c)ould prevent youth homelessness is well nigh impossible.(Charman, McClelland, Montague and Sully 1997, p.113)

The project aimed to prevent youth homelessness, but after spending $1.5 million the Brotherhood could not establish that any young person had actually been prevented from becoming homeless.

Projects which focus exclusively on prevention are impossible to assess because they have no measurable outcomes. In contrast, early intervention provides assistance to young people who are at the beginning of the homeless 'career'. It is possible to quantify the number of people who are assisted, and it is possible to assess the effectiveness of the program.

In Chapter 9 we illustrate how an effective early intervention strategy will include prevention, but prevention on its own should not be funded.

Focus on Secondary Schools

Point 5: 'Early intervention policy and practice to assist homeless young people should focus on secondary schools, not primary schools.'

Some people argue that early intervention should begin in primary schools. This involves a number of confusions. Early intervention involves providing assistance to young people as soon as possible after they have made a tentative break from home and family. Figure 5.2 showed that at any point in time

most homeless school students are aged between 15 and 17, although many have their first experience of homelessness somewhat younger than this. However, there is no evidence to indicate that there are homeless students in primary schools. Early intervention cannot begin in primary schools, because they do not have significant numbers of homeless students.

Advocates of early intervention in primary schools are actually talking about prevention. They want to provide assistance to young people before they have become homeless. This is well intentioned, but there are two serious problems with this approach.

First, it is obvious that one cannot know whether a seven or eight year old will become homeless in five to 10 years time. Homelessness is not preordained. Second, it is unfair to label a seven year old as 'at risk of homelessness', regardless of what family issues are involved. This is dangerous.

People who want to do 'early intervention' in primary schools are not usually talking about 'homelessness' as such. Rather, they are using 'homelessness' as a metaphor for a broader range of welfare concerns. They are pointing to the fact that there are primary students who appear to be encountering serious problems at home, and that there are families who are experiencing real difficulties with parenting. This is reasonable, and it is fine to call for improved student welfare in primary schools. But to claim that this is about 'preventing homelessness' is not warranted.

Schools linking with Community Agencies

Point 6: 'Early intervention involves schools and community agencies working together.'

Homeless teenagers often have complex issues to deal with including sensitive issues in family relationships, problems with

accommodation, questions about income support, involvement with the legal system, and drug or alcohol problems. This means schools often cannot provide all the support services that homeless teenagers might need, and that cross-sectoral collaboration between schools and welfare agencies is essential.

The suggestion of a closely coordinated partnership cuts across the traditional practices of both schools and community agencies. This can be described as the 'two cultures' problem. Schools have generally operated as self-sufficient worlds whose main mission is classroom teaching. Likewise, the community sector has operated largely outside the education system. For early intervention to succeed, this cultural Berlin Wall must be breached.

Community Clusters

Point 7: 'Schools in the same community have to work together to support homeless teenagers and young people at risk. This will only come about if there is a government directive that all schools must have an adequate welfare infrastructure, and there is funding for coordination initiatives in local communities.'

In one community where we carried out fieldwork, nine schools participated in the at risk survey. They reported similar results, with about five per cent of their students at serious risk. Welfare teachers in these schools were familiar with homeless students, and homelessness was recognised as an 'issue' in the local community. However, there were weak links between the schools, and they did not work together on welfare issues in a coordinated way.

One secondary college had a long standing commitment to assisting disadvantaged students. The school welfare team were ably supporting homeless students, young refugees trying to live independently, and teenagers with other problems. The school

had a number of special programs, and it had responded to the needs of disadvantaged students by making innovations in the curriculum. The school had strong links with local community services, and staff were doing their best to support disadvantaged students to complete their education.

However, the Principal of a large secondary school in the same area decided to promote his school as the 'academic' school. He focuses exclusively on 'learning', and he offers no encouragement to teachers who want to adopt a holistic approach to education. This Principal thinks that 'non performers' should leave, and this includes students who are 'difficult'. There is no pastoral care program in the college, and the welfare coordinator has only a nominal time allowance.

Over the last few years, this school has begun to attract more students because it has become known as the 'academic school', whereas the full-service school has become labelled as the 'welfare school' and its enrolment is declining. The Principal of the 'academic school' continues to 'ease out' students who are failing or 'causing trouble', and they often turn up at the caring school asking for enrolment. Many of these young people come from non-English speaking backgrounds, and they often have parents who are unemployed. The Principal of the caring school is reluctant to turn them away, because she believes that all kids 'deserve more than one chance'. As the number of disadvantaged students at her school has increased, so 'middle class' parents in the local community have started to send their children elsewhere.

The way around the problem of school labelling is for schools and agencies to work together on welfare issues, with a basic commitment to sharing resources and to providing an adequate welfare infrastructure in all schools. This will only come about if there is a government policy decision that all schools must belong to community clusters, cooperating on welfare programs, sharing resources, and planning for the needs of all their students.

Coordination, Coordination, Coordination

Point 8: 'An early intervention strategy requires coordination at all levels of the service system - at the client level, at the local community level, and at the government level.'

Every major report on youth homelessness has highlighted the issue of coordination (HREOC 1989; House of Representatives 1995), yet it appears difficult to achieve. There are four Commonwealth departments involved in the provision of services to homeless youth and three or four departments in each State and Territory. These departments have considerable autonomy, and they do not work together effectively. This is the challenge of coordinated service delivery, and it can be thought about in three ways - at the client level, at the local level, and at the government level.

The *client level* relates to how services are delivered to young people. The challenge here is to provide services to a young person in a coordinated way, so they are not forced to 'tell their story over and over again' to a string of professional workers. The debilitating effects of this on young people are well known. Proper arrangements can be put in place to avoid this, and the system is usually called 'case management'. This means that the young person forms a special relationship with one service provider (the case manager) who attempts to think about the client's situation overall. The case manager will help the young person access a number of different services, and the case manager will provide on going support. However, case management only works if there is coordination at the local level.

The *local level* relates to how services are organised and coordinated in a particular community. Case management has to be coordinated at the local level, because different service providers have to develop protocols about how young people will

be allocated to case managers. The system breaks down if there is no coordination, because the young person can end up being 'case managed' by workers from four or five different agencies, which is counter productive. This can be avoided if there is a coordination 'structure' in the local community which brings together the service providers and local schools on a regular basis. The task of the coordination agency is: to develop protocols between the service providers on how clients will be allocated to case managers; to develop an itinerary of all the services available in the local area; and to make planning and policy decisions affecting the whole community.

The problem of coordinated service delivery at the *government* level is a major issue despite the plethora of inter-departmental committees. First, there is the question of whether the services provided by different government departments are distributed across the country in a rational way. Second, there is the issue of whether different departments use consistent criteria regarding eligibility for various types of benefits and services. Third, there is the question of whether the services delivered by Commonwealth departments are coordinated with services delivered by the States. Overall policy coordination is the biggest and most challenging question upon which everything else ultimately depends. We discuss some proposals for how youth policy might be better coordinated in Chapter 11.

Early Intervention is Cost Effective

Point 9: 'A school based early intervention policy is cost effective. However, to realise the benefits, a long-term strategy must be pursued.'

These days politicians and policy makers are much more anxious about the costs and benefits of social programs than ever before. Will a school based early intervention strategy be cost effective?

Pinkney and Ewing (1997) have undertaken the first cost-benefit analysis of early intervention using Australian data. They argue that the real economic cost to the community does not arise primarily from government expenditure needed to support young people in the absence of family and employment. Rather, it is a consequence of a more fundamental undermining of economic well-being, resulting from the reduced productive capacity of the nation as a whole. They identify the key economic costs of youth homelessness focusing on labour market efficiency, health related costs, and involvement in the criminal justice system.

The cost of ill-health and involvement in the criminal justice system amounted to $132 million in 1994. The economic costs of homelessness attributable foregone education and long-term unemployment amounted to $442 million. The total cost was $574 million. Against this, they estimate the annual cost of a national early intervention strategy at $100 million. Pinkney and Ewing (1997, pp.5-6) conclude:

> Had a national strategy been in place in 1994 we estimate a potential net benefit of $474 million which means that early intervention would 'break even' at a success rate of 21 per cent. Even if only one quarter of homeless students could be helped to complete their secondary education and avoid prolonged homelessness, the economic benefit to the community would outweigh the cost.

A school based early intervention strategy is affordable. However to realise the benefits of school based early intervention, a long-term strategy must be pursued.

Integrated Approach to Youth issues

Point 10: 'The welfare resources required in school for effective early intervention to assist homeless youth are largely the same resources needed to respond to issues such as drug abuse, youth suicide and early school leaving.'

The increase in retention rates in government schools from about 35 per cent in the late 1970s to just over 70 per cent in the late 1990s means that many schools have had to confront new issues, including teenage drug use, youth suicide, homelessness and early school leaving. Many of the underlying issues are similar, and in practice involve the same professionals. A number of reports have drawn attention to the crucial role of schools in an integrated approach to youth problems (Victorian Taskforce 1997).

At present, drug use, suicide, homelessness and early school leaving are treated separately and large amounts of money are sometimes expended on one-off campaigns about particular issues. These probably do some good, but they tend to involve large quantities of glossy brochures and other ephemera which have no lasting effect.

The policy challenge is to put in place long-term structures in schools which are relevant to all of these issues. This means effective strategies for early intervention and prevention; appropriately trained staff and a strong welfare infrastructure everywhere; and the development of coordinated links between schools and welfare agencies in their local community.

CHAPTER 9

EARLY INTERVENTION IN PRACTICE

This chapter illustrates how schools might become effective sites for early intervention and prevention, using a technique called 'composite case analysis'.[1] The approach combines information from a number of different schools to produce an 'ideal typical' model, which embodies some of what we know about best practice, based on fieldwork during 1996.

Roxborough High School[2]

Roxborough High School is located on the outskirts of a major capital city, and it is surrounded by housing developments and industrial estates. Roxborough North is 'middle class', whereas Roxborough City is 'working class'. There is also a large public housing area known as 'the Valley'.

The High School was built about thirty years ago when the growth corridor began to expand, and the enrolment is currently 980. Roughly half of the students live in Roxborough City, one-third come from Roxborough North, and about one-fifth come from 'the Valley'. About 35 per cent are from non-English speaking backgrounds.

[1]It follows the procedure used in Connell (1985).

[2]The names in the composite case are invented.

Staff

The school has 44 teachers and six support staff. Brian Cummings is the Principal and Heather Schultz is the Deputy and they share a common philosophy of education. They place a strong emphasis on educational achievement, and they encourage young people to aspire to higher education. They also believe that young people can succeed in a variety of different ways, and they encourage excellence in other forms of endeavour, including the arts, community service and sporting achievement. Most importantly, they think that schools should be concerned about the overall well-being of their students.

Brian and Heather see no intrinsic tension between encouraging young people to succeed in their chosen area of endeavour, and the provision of a caring and supportive school environment. According to Heather:

> ... Both are integral components of a holistic approach to education ...

They have attracted a number of talented, younger staff to the school who share their philosophy, and they work cooperatively with a core group of active teachers who are making Roxborough into a dynamic educational institution.

Sally Robinson is the full-time school counsellor. She trained as a teacher, but in her early thirties she completed a social work qualification, and then a Diploma in Counselling. Sally has extensive teaching and welfare experience, including a period working with homeless teenagers. This had a major impact on her thinking, and she is strongly supportive of 'early intervention'. Sally emphasises that it is important to have flexible strategies for dealing with homeless students. She says that the key is building relationships:

> Kids who are in trouble at home need to know that someone cares about them ...

Heather (Deputy Principal) takes overall administrative responsibility for welfare in the school and she coordinates the school's welfare committee. However, she works closely with Sally on a day to day basis. Heather feels particularly strongly about homelessness:

> I would never let a young person leave this office if they had nowhere to go.

She also believes that if a young person is in trouble at home, then there should be someone who they can talk to at school.

The school has an early intervention strategy and a prevention program. Sally focuses on early intervention and case work, and she also liaises with community agencies. Heather has taken overall responsibility for developing preventative strategies in the school.

Prevention

Preventative strategies focus on young people before the tentative break. They include *school strategies* which are directed towards all young people, and *group strategies* which are directed towards groups who are thought to have higher risk levels. At the centre of Roxborough's preventative strategy is a well developed pastoral care program.

School strategy: pastoral care

When students enter the school, they join a form group with a pastoral teacher. The pastoral care teacher takes special responsibility for his or her students, and they stay with the same group as it progresses through school. Students see their pastoral care teacher every morning for 15 minutes, and for another 10 minutes at the beginning of the afternoon session.

They also have two weekly lessons with their pastoral care teacher from Years 7 to 10. This is known as the *Contemporary Social Issues* program and it tackles serious topics which have

attracted media attention. It allows young people to discuss personal development, building relationships, managing conflict, health, sexuality, racism, bereavement, family relations, and drug and alcohol use. Each term students focus on three social issues using a resources kit developed by the school. They discuss the media's coverage of the issue, as well as substantive questions raised by the topic.

One topic is 'Death and Bereavement'. This focuses on media coverage of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. The school videoed various news programs, including coverage of her funeral, and students examined newspaper reports and magazine articles. This topic raised many issues that students found important. How do we deal with the unexpected death of a loved one? How do young people who lose a parent in an accident come to terms with such an event? How should we deal with the death of grandparents? Why do people grieve and what does the process of grieving involve? How does a male parent bring up children on his own?

The topic promoted discussion about the role of the media, individual privacy, and the role of 'celebrities' in public life. It also raised questions about the causes of motor accidents, including speed and alcohol misuse.

Finally, a number of senior classes read Earl Spencer's eulogy for his sister. This included his assessment of Princess Diana's vulnerability, her eating disorders, and her charitable works. Students discussed the advantages and disadvantages of becoming a well-known public figure such as an entertainer or a musician; the possible reasons why young people develop eating disorders (including the case of a footballer who developed *anorexia nervosa*); the reasons why people become involved in charity work; and the role of charities in contemporary society.

The Contemporary Social Issues program discusses issues which young people find important. It raises questions about

building relationships, personal development, managing conflict, as well as topics such as minority groups, community service, health issues, sexuality and so on. These discussions enable pastoral care teachers to get to know their students well. The pastoral care teacher is usually the first person to identify that a young person is 'in trouble at home'.

Group strategies

Roxborough has a number of alternative programs for young people who are thought to have higher risk levels, involving group activities which are designed to develop personal skills and to raise self-esteem.

About 35 per cent of Roxborough's students are from non-English speaking backgrounds, and this includes about 30 young people whose families have arrived as refugees from various parts of the world. Some students have spent long periods in refugee camps, and a number of families are survivors of torture. Roxborough runs a number of special programs for these young people, including workshops which focus on adapting to life in contemporary Australia, special language classes, and community visits to examine aspects of Australia's cultural heritage. The school also runs many activities which celebrate the diverse cultural background of its students.

The school runs 'Wilderness Camps' for students in Year 9, but this includes a special program for young people who appear to lack personal discipline and self-esteem. These young people go on a 'special challenge' camp, involving 8 to 10 students and two staff members. They take part in challenging physical activities which involve adventure and build self-confidence. These students often develop a special relationship with one of the teachers, and in many cases there is a marked improvement in their behaviour at school.

The school has developed a special program for young people

who appear withdrawn and isolated from other students. It is run by the school's three art teachers who have pioneered alternative teaching strategies. Each teacher is currently working with four young people on a series of murals to brighten up an ageing building on campus. The theme for the project is 'Young People in a New Millennium'. The program began with a visit to two local art galleries, and then a visit to the State Art Centre to see an overseas exhibition. The teachers have given the students a lot of individual attention, and an obvious camaraderie is developing among the 12 participants.

Early Intervention

Roxborough has developed a comprehensive early intervention strategy. It involves: procedures for identifying homeless students; strategies to facilitate family reconciliation; ongoing help for young people who cannot return home; professional development for teachers; and effective links with local community services.

Effective identification

The school is required to keep records on attendance. However, Heather and Sally use these records for additional purposes. If a student is absent for three days, they will telephone parents to find out why. 'Cases sometimes come to light in this way, and if they do, it gives us a chance to speak to parents immediately'. Students truant for a range of reasons, but Heather and Sally believe that truancy is symptomatic of deeper issues. Monitoring truancy has enabled them to identify homeless students.

However, the pastoral care system is now in its third year, and it is beginning to 'pay dividends'. Sally reports that pastoral care teachers are often able to identify when a young person is homeless or at serious risk. She thinks that this is a more sensitive way of identifying homeless students, and in the long-term the other procedure will be discontinued.

She points out that the school's early intervention strategy is proactive. When there is effective pastoral care, homeless students often ask their pastoral care teachers for help. However, in a minority of cases this does not happen. These students usually come to the attention of the pastoral care teacher, because another student tells them that a friend has been 'thrown out' or 'run away'. Pastoral teachers use this information proactively to see whether the young person needs help.

Ongoing assistance

Pastoral care teachers must refer homeless students to Sally Robinson (counsellor). Sally takes day-to-day responsibility for coordinating assistance to them. At any point in time, she will know how many homeless students there are, where they are staying, and what is happening to each one. She also briefs Heather on a regular basis, and sometimes Heather and Sally interview parents together.

Sally points out that it is very time consuming working with homeless students, and a new case will often take up most of her time for two or three days:

> Kids need to talk ... and you have to sit and listen. You can't say, 'Half an hour. That's it'. Usually, they need to talk about things quite a few times ... The parents need to talk too.

Sally says that her first priority is to explore whether there is a possibility for reconciliation. This involves talking to the parents and to the young person, and sometimes she will organise a family conference at the school. These are often effective.

If reconciliation is not possible, then her next priority is to stabilise the young person's accommodation situation:

> Until you get them settled somewhere, they can't deal with all the other things ... they don't concentrate at school ... they can't deal with all the emotional issues ... Everything falls apart very quickly.

There are a number of options, and it depends upon the age and maturity of the young person. In most cases, Sally prefers to find another family who will allow the young person to board with them.

Another priority is income. Young people often need help with an application for income support (Austudy at the homeless rate), and in many cases they need emergency financial assistance. The Principal has established a welfare fund which is supported by profits from the school's second hand book cooperative. The cooperative takes a small fee ($1 to $2) from the sale price of each book, and this raised nearly $1,000 for the welfare fund last year.

Sally has developed an Independent Living Skills program for young people who cannot return home. Students meet once a week to discuss managing money, cooking skills and shopping. They have had practical classes on cooking, and there have been joint shopping expeditions to Roxborough Market. On alternative Fridays they cook lunch and Sally is usually invited.

Sally has also initiated a mentor (buddy) system. She says, 'I can't do everything myself. There are lots of teachers who are willing to give a hand'. Once it becomes clear that a young person is unable to return home, or is unwilling to do so, then a staff member is assigned to the young person to give ongoing support. The mentor is selected on an informal basis. It could be Sally herself, or the pastoral care teacher, or another teacher who is close to the student. The buddy acts as a friend and confidant. They are expected to take a special interest in the young person, and to provide ongoing support.

Staff support

Sally knows from her social work experience that mentors need training and professional supervision. She runs a short in service course for teachers joining the mentoring program, and there are regular meetings involving everyone in the welfare team. These

meetings enable mentors to share information about particular students, and to provide support for staff who are dealing with difficult cases. They also enable the team to celebrate successes, such as when a young person returns home or makes a decision to stay at school. Heather makes a point of attending: 'I like to thank my staff who are doing a good job'.

Recently, Sally invited Lena Spiteri from the Roxborough Youth Forum to discuss 'case management' with the group. Lena explained that the aim of case management is to have one worker who becomes the primary support person for a homeless client. The intention is to avoid the demoralising situation where a young person has many different workers trying to help them, and they are expected to tell their story 'over and over again'. Everyone agreed, 'It's what we are trying to achieve with our mentor program'.

However, Lena pointed out that the school also needs to coordinate its activities with other services: 'There is nothing to be gained if young people end up with four case managers, all in different places'. Two people agreed to go along to the next youth forum, where this issue is being discussed.

Utilising community services

The school cannot provide all the resources needed by homeless students, and Sally knows where to go when they need services that are not available in the school. The school participates in the local Youth Issues Forum which has facilitated networking between the school and local community agencies. Sally emphasises, 'This has been invaluable in terms of linking into other services'.

The chairperson of the Roxborough Youth Forum is Peter Jones, who is also the coordinator of the local Youth Accommodation Service (YAS). Peter has been the driving force behind the establishment of the forum, and he is formidable organiser.

The forum brings together representatives from six secondary schools in the area, two people from the city council, representatives from nine local services, four people from government departments, and delegates from three church groups. The city council have provided secretarial and administrative assistance, and the forum meets in the Roxborough Town Hall on the first Tuesday of every month.

The forum plans to deal with many issues. They are particularly concerned with youth unemployment in the local community, the lack of recreational resources for teenagers, drug and alcohol abuse, and the issue of student homelessness. This year, they have developed a systematic itinerary of what is available for homeless teenagers in Roxborough, and they are currently discussing how local schools and agencies can develop a coordinated approach to case management.

Through the Youth Issues Forum, Sally has got to know Magda Spitzkowski who is the social worker at the regional Austudy office. Magda assesses applications for Austudy at the homeless rate. This link is important, because students applying for Homeless Austudy often encounter difficulties. Sally says, 'If I have an emergency, I can always ring Magda. She'll do her best to help'. Sally has also met Barbara Keane from the local Adolescent and Family Therapy Mediation service. Sally has referred a number of families to this service. 'They're good. We've had some real successes'.

Sally has got to know Nick Pappas from the local drug and alcohol counselling service. Nick has started coming to the school on a regular basis to take part in the Contemporary Social Issues program. Sally has also met Jill Farmer, a dietitian, from the local Community Health Centre. Jill specialises in eating disorders, and she now comes to the school on a regular basis. Sally is full of praise for Jill. A number of young women have come forward after her classes.

Peter Jones is the coordinator of the Youth Accommodation Service (YAS), which is the main source of emergency housing for young people in the local area. It includes the local youth refuge which can accommodate eight people. Sally says that the staff are 'really good', but she cautions that 'sending a student to a refuge is a last resort'. This is because young people staying in refuges have often made a permanent break from home, and they are often out of school as well. Sally suggested to Peter that they need some supervised accommodation just for school students.

Peter raised this at the last Youth Forum, and the representatives from the other schools endorsed the idea. One of the church groups suggested that an empty house owned by the church might be suitable. Peter has established a sub-committee to work on the idea. They have coopted a representative from the local Rotary Club, which is interested in raising funds for the project.

In the meantime, Sally has a list of families in the local area who will take a young person in an emergency. At present, this is done on a voluntary basis.

Issues and Strategies

School leadership

The philosophy of school leaders is important. Most principals have a strong commitment to academic goals, and encourage young people to aspire to higher education. However, some principals emphasise this to such an extent that teachers take it to mean that welfare issues are unimportant. In these schools welfare staff are often demoralised and apathetic. There are other principals who think it is inappropriate for schools to be involved in welfare. In these schools, there is very little happening:

> Interviewer: Do you have a pastoral care system?
>
> Teacher: (Laughter) No! The Principal should hear you ask that!

At Roxborough High, the Principal (Brian) and the Deputy Principal (Heather) espouse a holistic philosophy of education. They have a strong commitment to academic goals, but they also believe that schools should be concerned about the overall welfare of their students. They have promoted the ethos that Roxborough is a 'caring school', and pastoral care is an important part of the curriculum. Their vision is reflected in school procedures:

> Of course, my staff know what to do! We have procedures in place.

The approach of Brian and Heather raises the morale the welfare team, and it creates a high level of staff commitment:

> I can go to Brain and Heather for anything. They are 100 per cent supportive. The boss is excellent!

It is not necessary for the principal to be actively involved in the welfare program, but it is important that he or she should be supportive. In many schools, it is a dynamic deputy principal who oversees the program and who provides the leadership.

Trained welfare staff

Sally Robinson is a trained teacher with a social work qualification and a Diploma in Counselling. She also has a full-time position and a great deal of experience.

The House of Representatives (1995) Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness recommended that the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments undertake a full review of student welfare support services with a view to:

(1) establishing national standards for determining the ratio of counsellors to students and to schools
(2) establishing national qualification requirements for specialist support staff in schools (Recommendation 69)

This has not happened, but early intervention can only work if there are trained welfare staff in schools who can work with young

people on a one to one basis.

Early intervention

Many teachers understand homelessness in terms of the dominant stereotype about 'street kids', which they glean from the media. In a classroom situation, they are usually pre-occupied with the demands of classroom teaching. They have no reason to think about young people's family circumstances, and the issue of homelessness is unlikely to come up in a mathematics class.

An early intervention strategy has to raise awareness in schools. This is achieved through meetings with principals, discussions at staff meetings, and in-service training for teachers. It is a time consuming activity, but early intervention can only work if teachers recognise that most young people have their first experience of homelessness while they are still at school.

Early intervention is based on the premise that it is easier to assist young people before their problems have become firmly entrenched. However, school counsellors have to know which students need their assistance. This is the problem of early identification, and it is a major issue in most schools:

> I only know those who come to see me. Even then, it's hard to remember their names. (Social welfare coordinator, Victoria)

Welfare teachers wanted to take part in the at risk survey (Chapter 6), because they saw it as a practical solution to the problem of early identification. The research team provided the welfare coordinator with a confidential list of those young people who scored five or more on the survey. This brought to light a number of young people who were doing well at school, but who scored high on the survey.

However, a survey does not solve all the problems associated with early identification. First, schools report that young people who are at risk are often absent. Second, the results from a survey

reflect the perceptions of the young person on the morning in question. A high score should alert welfare staff to the possibility that someone might be at risk, but this may not be a continuing crisis. Third, a young person with a low score could be in serious difficulties with his or her family three months later. For these reasons, a survey has to be used with caution.

In everyday welfare practice, schools need ongoing procedures for identifying young people who are at risk, with clear lines for internal reporting and referral. The most effective way to do this is through a well developed pastoral care system. Roxborough High illustrates how this might be done.

Welfare practice

Trained welfare staff are the best people to put in place effective practices for assisting homeless students. There is more than one way of doing this, and the practices and procedures should take into account the organisational structure of the school and any special characteristics of the local community.

In some schools, the approach to welfare focuses on a *centralised* strategy, whereas in others it is *decentralised*. The decentralised strategy involves a large welfare team. The time allowance for welfare is shared by six to eight people, and everyone gets three to four hours time relief per week. No-one takes overall responsibility for homeless students, and each person in the welfare team is expected to take appropriate action if a homeless teenager comes to their attention. In these schools, no-one is usually sure how many homeless students there are overall, and most people in the welfare team lack training.

A centralised strategy involves one person taking day to day responsibility for homeless students. At Roxborough High the welfare coordinator takes on this role. One of her tasks is to know how many homeless students there are; where are they currently staying; what is the situation with their family; and which services

are they accessing. She is directly responsible to the Deputy Principal (Welfare), who provides professional supervision and who may assist in serious cases.

This centralised strategy works more effectively, and it allows the welfare coordinator time to work with homeless students. This is important because homeless teenagers often have complex problems to sort out. Counsellors also report that building relationships is crucial, and this takes time:

> They always need to know that you care. It takes time to build trust.
>
> If you don't have a relationship with them, then you cannot help.

The welfare coordinator has to set in place practices for providing ongoing support for students who cannot return home. Some young people move onto independent living fairly quickly, and they need minimal assistance. Others require intermittent help over a much longer time frame. A school based mentoring program is an effective way of providing support to homeless students. However, some teenagers prefer to get longer-term assistance from a support worker at a community agency. In a coordinated system, the school counsellor will remain in contact with this person.

Finally, the social welfare coordinator should take responsibility for helping young people access local services. The counsellor has to know what services are available in the local community, and how to make referrals. Schools often operate as self-sufficient worlds, where the primary task is classroom teaching. Likewise, welfare agencies often have no contact with schools. This cultural Berlin Wall has to be breached if early intervention is to work. This is most easily facilitated where there is a local youth issues forum, but if this is not available then the Deputy Principal (Welfare) and the school counsellor have to begin building these bridges. There are communities where this has happened. Agency

staff are usually very supportive when a Deputy Principal suggests a possible link with the local high school, but the school usually has to take the initiative

Conclusion

Schools can be sites for effective early intervention and prevention. However, Roxborough High School is special in three respects.

First, the school has a very strong staff team. It has good leaders who have set about turning the school into an excellent educational institution. They encourage young people to aspire to higher education, and they promote excellence in all forms of endeavour. They also believe that schools should be 'caring institutions', and they have attracted a number of talented staff to the school who share their philosophy. Staff morale is high, and many people in the school have a sense of mission. Most importantly, the school has a full-time welfare coordinator who has a great deal of energy and initiative. She is very experienced at working with young people who are in crisis. She has also been instrumental in developing links with community agencies.

Second, the Deputy Principal (Welfare) and the school counsellor have put effective practices and procedures in place to assist homeless students. Roxborough's preventative strategy is built upon its pastoral care system, and homeless teenagers usually come to the attention of their pastoral care teacher. They are then referred to the school counsellor who is responsible for making an assessment of their situation, and deciding on what course of action will be taken. If they are unable to return home, she will link them in to supports provided by the school and help them to access other community services.

Third, there are contextual factors which have contributed to Roxborough's success. The school has a relatively modest problem with homelessness. There are about six to eight homeless students

at any point in time. Sally says that this is 'plenty'. There are usually another 10 to 12 independent students who are linked into the mentoring program and involved in the independent living skills group. Finally, there are many community services available in Roxborough. The school has linked into this network through its involvement in the Youth Issues Forum. If these services were not available, then it would be a lot more difficult for the welfare team to be effective.

CHAPTER 10

HIGH NEED SCHOOLS

There are some schools which experience the problem of youth homelessness in contexts which bring some unique factors to the policy equation. Whilst a good policy should be clear and coherent enough to adequately fit most circumstances, it should also be sufficiently flexible to address the needs of more difficult cases. This chapter focuses on three situations in an attempt to highlight how the problem may be experienced in distinctive ways. The contexts are: senior secondary colleges, schools in rural communities, and high need situations including schools with special populations, and schools in areas of chronic disadvantage. The accounts are based on fieldwork during 1996.

Senior Secondary Colleges

Senior secondary colleges are separate schools for young people completing Years 11 and 12. They usually have between 700 and 1,500 students and they resemble small university campuses. In Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, this is the way the school system has been organised and there are small numbers of senior secondary colleges in other states.

The advantage of the senior secondary college model is that it offers a transitional regime between the school experience of

earlier years and the adult education of universities and TAFE colleges. There are no requirements about school uniform; students may leave the campus if they do not have classes; and, in general, there is less monitoring and supervision of students. Teachers believe that the adult ambience of senior colleges is positive, and most students appreciate the greater freedom for exercising responsibility. However, there is an important caveat: senior colleges do not work well for young people who are troubled by family breakdown or other major issues in their lives.

A senior college is likely to have at least three to four times more homeless students than a conventional high school, and most of these young people drop out. The national census of homeless school students revealed that many senior colleges gave an estimate in excess of 25, and they reported a steady trickle of new cases every week. Other colleges reported:

> We have an enrolment of 1,200. I probably know 300 of them. I know the homeless students who come to see me ... But if they don't come ... then I don't know ...

However, staff in senior colleges were certain that:

> The vast majority do not finish the school year. It's almost a one-way street. (Principal, senior secondary college, Victoria, census return 32)

Senior secondary colleges have a bigger problem with homelessness than high schools, because homelessness peaks when young people are about 16 or 17 years old (Figure 5.2), and most students in senior secondary colleges are about 16 or 17. Senior colleges are also less effective at supporting homeless students, and many drop out. This is because they often have insufficient welfare staff to deal with the number of homeless students, and because the problem of early identification is more intractable.

In a conventional year 7 to 12 high school, the school

counsellor will get to know many students as they progress through school, and teachers will sometimes recognise that a student is in trouble and refer them to the school counsellor. However, in senior secondary colleges there is a huge influx of new Year 11 students every February. The exact number will depend on the size of the college, but it is common for it to be between 500 and 800 new students. It is impossible for the school counsellor to get to know most of them, and their teachers are new as well.

The problem of early identification is also more difficult because most senior secondary colleges have no meaningful pastoral care system. The dominant ethos of senior colleges promotes student independence, and young people are expected to ask for assistance if they need it. When there is no pastoral care system in place, it means that the young people who need help are left to fend for themselves. Many senior secondary colleges report that 20 per cent of their Year 11 students drop out in the first term. Most of these young people never go to the welfare staff for help, and their teachers usually have no idea where they have gone. In practice, they include some young people who have found jobs, but welfare teachers say that they also include homeless students and other young people in need.

The year 11 drop out rate declines sharply after the first few months. However, early identification continues to depend on homeless students making a self-referral. They have to know that there are welfare facilities available in the school, and have sufficient self-confidence to seek out assistance. In many cases, they do not.

The challenge for senior secondary colleges is: (1) to reduce the number of Year 11 students who discontinue in the first term; (2) to develop procedures for identifying homeless students; and (3) to provide support for homeless and independent students who remain at school

Strategies

During 1996 we worked with eight senior secondary colleges in Tasmania, and the measures we describe are being pioneered at a number of sites. A typical senior college will be located in a capital city or a large regional centre and have anywhere between 700 and 1,500 students. One college in a regional centre has an enrolment of about 1,000 students, including 80 independent students who come from rural communities to complete their education.[1] These young people often board with families, or live in shared households with other teenagers. Many are on Austudy at the independent rate ($120. 03 per week). They are at risk of homelessness because of their low incomes, and the absence of family support in town.

The Assistant Principal (Welfare) drew the following points to the attention of staff: 114 Year 11 students discontinued during the first term; 52 students were on Austudy at the independent rate (living away from home); 10 were receiving Austudy at the homeless rate; and five young people were living at the local youth refuge. The school decided to develop a coordinated strategy to reduce the drop out rate, to identify homeless students, and to provide support for independent students who needed assistance.

The first strategy involves a transition program for students moving from Year 10 to the senior college. Teachers now visit all the feeder schools to talk to prospective students towards the end of Year 10. At this meeting, they invite students to visit the college for a day 'so you can get to know the place'. On the day, they go on tours, hear talks from teachers, meet older students, socialise at a barbecue, and have fun at a live music night held at the college. Some information about the students is gathered at this point, including their subject preferences, their family situation, and where they will live during the next year.

The transition program also includes activities at the start of

[1]This is a composite case based on information from a number of colleges.

the new school year. The orientation program has been extended from one day to three days. This includes a formal welcome, meetings with subject advisers, musical and theatre events on campus, a barbecue, and a rock concert. There is a Community Services Expo, including representatives from the local Austudy office, staff from various welfare services, as well as representatives from sporting and recreational facilities.

The second strategy is a student support program, which involves each young person being allocated to a personal tutor who they meet during the orientation program. This is not called pastoral care, but it involves the same principles. The personal adviser is someone who teaches the student in Year 11, and the tutor's primary responsibility is to support the young person in his/her studies, by taking a special interest in their welfare. At the first meeting, the tutor will check where they are living and enquire about their family situation. If the young person is an independent student (living away from home), the adviser is expected to check that the student's accommodation situation is stable, and to monitor this during the year. Tutors are required to see their students four times in the first term, and three times in subsequent terms, and to have as much informal contact as seems necessary. A brief case record is kept on each meeting, and there are various protocols in place. If a young person is homeless or at serious risk, then they must be referred to a member of the welfare team. The personal adviser is responsible for 20 students, and there is a time allowance for this.

The third change is an improved welfare infrastructure in the school. Some of the colleges have more welfare resources than other schools of comparable size, but others have less. For example, in one senior college in the Australian Capital Territory the counsellors recorded 26 homeless students in census week, but they did not know what had happened to them:

> I only work two days a week and (my colleague) works one. We've had four new cases this week. There is no time for follow-up work.

A number of college in Tasmania have appointed full-time counsellors to replace part-time positions, and some are also attempting to forge links with local community services for young people. One college has appointed a full-time social worker to the welfare team. She is responsible for making home visits and liaising with community agencies. The welfare team now meet regularly with the local SAAP youth accommodation agency and with workers from local counselling services and the community health centre.

In another college which has taken many of the measures described, the drop out rate at the beginning of year 11 has decreased from 20 per cent to four per cent. Improved procedures have revealed more homeless students and the workload for welfare staff has increased, but the college has become more effective at supporting homeless young people.

Country Schools

There are homeless students in many country schools, but the number of cases is usually smaller than in a city college, because the school population is lower in the country. In South Australia and Western Australia, approximately 80 per cent of the homeless students are in Adelaide and Perth. The remaining 20 per cent are spread thinly across a large number of communities with small populations. The pattern is roughly similar in Tasmania. About 90 per cent of homeless students are in four cities: Hobart, Launceston, Devonport and Burnie. The remainder are spread thinly across the rest of the state.

In the Eastern states, there are more people living outside of the capital cities, and the number of homeless students is greater. Table 10.1 shows that there were 32 country communities in New South Wales which recorded 10 or more homeless students in

e 10.1 Rural towns where schools recorded 10 or more homeless students, May 1994

New South Wales (N = 32)		Victoria (N = 17)	Queensland (N = 12)
Albury	Lismore	Bairnsdale	Charters Towers
Bowral	Maitland	Castlemaine	Gympie
Casino	Moree	Colac	Mirani
Cessnock	Mudgee	Echuca	Mossman
Coffs Harbour	Mullumbimby	Hamilton	Mount Isa
Cooma	Murwillumbah	Kooweerup	Mount Morgan
Cowra	Nowra	Leongatha	Proserpine
Dubbo	Orange	Mildura	Ravenshoe
Forbes	Port MacQuarie	Portland	Rosewood
Glen Innes	Raymond Tce	Rosebud	Sarina
Gilgandra	Tamworth	Sale	St. George
Goulburn	Taree	Seymour	Yeppoon
Grafton	Wagga Wagga	Shepparton	
Griffith	Wellington	Swan Hill	
Katoomba	Walgett	Wangaratta	
Kurri Kurri	Woolgoolga	Warrnambool	
		Wonthaggi	

census week, as well as 17 communities in Victoria and 12 in Queensland. The average number of homeless students in these towns was 23 in New South Wales, 22 in Victoria and 20 in Queensland. The students were usually spread across a number of schools.

In order to develop early intervention and prevention strategies in the country, it is necessary to overcome three problems, apart from dealing with any unique issues in the local community. First, there is the issue of raising community awareness. Country towns may have a stronger identity as a 'local community', but they are usually more conservative places and they are often unaware of homeless teenagers. For example, in one country town in our sample a minor controversy about homelessness was played out in the local newspaper. Youth workers reported that they were dealing with an increased number

of homeless teenagers, but prominent figures in the local community, including a well-known police officer, dismissed the claims as 'nonsense'. In many rural communities, there is a widespread belief that homelessness is a city issue, and this belief is often shared by teachers in the local school.

Second, there is the problem of distance. Country towns may be hundreds of kilometres from the capital city and quite a distance from other nearby towns. This often has implications for service delivery.

Finally, there is the issue of limited resources. Country towns usually get a share of resources based on a formula involving population size. A rural compensation factor is often used, but the result may still be problematic for service delivery. The resources available in a regional centre are often comparable with a suburban community, but in many smaller towns there may be no services for homeless teenagers and no personnel who are experienced at dealing with the issue.

Strategies

In 1996 we worked with two country communities where there was an attempt to develop a *community coordinated* approach to early intervention across a number of country towns. This involves setting up an *early intervention agency* which focuses on raising community awareness, coordinating links between schools and local services, and in service training for teachers. A sophisticated version of this model also includes the provision of case management for those young people who require more support than the school welfare team can provide.

In one community in North-Eastern Victoria, the agency was located in a regional city of 20,000 people. The project included three schools in the regional centre and five schools in smaller towns. These were about one hour's drive from the regional centre and they had few services. However, there were other services

in the regional centre, and the agency staff had a clear vision of what needed to be done.

A regional early intervention agency has to begin by raising community awareness. This involves a process of community development, and the formulation of a community plan. It means consulting all the different stakeholders about their understanding of the problem, and what they think might be done. The consultation usually includes teenagers, parents, teachers, youth workers, school principals, other service providers, and local politicians. This is a time consuming process and it has to be done well. The culmination is often a community forum which symbolises the community's decision to take action. The community forum will discuss the community plan, and set the broad parameters of the early intervention strategy. People in country towns often have a strong sense of community identity, and this can be used to generate a sense that this is 'our community's problem', and that the community 'must work together to solve it'.

The second task for an early intervention agency is to take responsibility for coordinating links between school and local services. This usually involves the development of a community services directory, and making sure that school welfare staff know what services are available. This is important, because people may not know what is available in a country town 120 km away. The early intervention agency also organises meetings where welfare staff and community service providers can get to know one another, and put in place protocols about service delivery. When welfare staff from the eight schools come to attend a meeting in the regional centre, they travel more than 600 km between them. This means that meetings can only be held occasionally and they must be worthwhile.

The early intervention agency also operates as a resource which schools can use to improve welfare procedures in school. The agency has organised in-service training for teachers and

provided short courses in the local regional centre. They have invited representatives from outside agencies to speak at a number of these meetings, and there have been panel discussions involving welfare teachers, guest speakers, agency staff, and school principals. The early intervention agency has also worked closely with schools to develop preventative strategies, including the training of young people as student mentors, and the development of pastoral care. There have also been activities to encourage student 'empowerment', including a one day conference for senior students focusing on youth issues.

When an early intervention agency has sufficient resources, it can also provide case management for young people who have complex problems which school staff cannot deal with. Our agencies did not provide this, but it would be a valuable resource in country communities, because welfare teachers often have part-time positions and limited training. It is efficient for a regional agency to provide case management across a number of schools, but it is resource intensive because of the 'tyranny of distance'. In a country area such as we have described, it might involve two full-time case managers working across eight schools, in addition to a full-time project manager.

High Need Communities

This term refers to schools which have higher numbers of homeless students, and to schools where there are homeless students with especially complex needs.

Schools with high numbers

The national census revealed that 21 per cent of government schools had 10 or more homeless students, five per cent reported 25 or more, and two per cent had more than 40. We visited some of the high needs schools in every state, and we focus on schools which reported 25 or more homeless pupils. There are about 80 of

these across the country. They are usually located in poor suburbs and welfare staff are dealing with a range of issues besides homelessness.

In one school we visited, two students had hung themselves outside of the school the year before. In another, a 'bomb scare' was taking place during our field visit:

> 'Was it one of the students who did this?', I asked.
>
> 'Most likely not', replied the Principal. ' It's some bloke out there with nothing better to do. This is for his perverse amusement. We've had it happen before ... He wants to disrupt the school and watch everybody file out'.

In a third school, the Vice-Principal reported that they had a significant number of sexual abuse cases among young female students. 'We are located in the highest area for sexual abuse in the state', he said. In another school, we were told:

> We have kids who 'shoot up' ... Heroin is being manufactured in this suburb ... There are kids who are 'dealing' as well ...

Many of the schools with 25 or more homeless students reported that they had high numbers of unemployed parents in the local community. Some said that there were many blended families and single parent households. Others reported that it was common for families to move into the area and then to move away again, and often students left with no explanation. These schools were in areas of 'chronic disadvantage', and they were often overwhelmed by the range of problems they had to deal with. The 'high need' schools fall into two groups.

First, there are the 'pessimists'. In these schools, senior staff and welfare teachers have become apathetic in the face of the problems. The Deputy Principal of a high school in a major regional centre said:

> There are lots of inadequate families around here. They produce inadequate

children. What can you do? (Census return 28)

A guidance officer in the outer-west of Sydney commented:

I suppose I keep an eye on them from afar. That's all really. (Census return 25)

There was no effective pastoral care program in the school, and the Principal was not supportive on welfare issues. The staff in the 'pessimistic' schools suffer from a lack of confidence that they can change anything, and they often draw on theories about the inevitability of failure. In many of these schools, welfare staff make only a nominal effort to assist homeless teenagers and other young people with problems.

The second group are the 'optimists'. These schools usually have a dynamic Principal who has a vision of a 'better world'. He or she will have impressive leadership skills and they motivate their staff to do their best in difficult circumstances. These schools are battling to meet the challenge and their staff are in heroic mode. They are resourceful, committed, hard-working, and they have a strong commitment to help disadvantaged students. They also want to provide good quality education for all young people, and they recognise that different strategies are sometimes needed for different groups.

Some of these schools have developed alternative programs for those students who do not fit into the mainstream educational curriculum, and who need to be taught in smaller groups using alternative strategies. This usually involves small groups of students working intensively with one or two teachers, sometimes in an annex attached to the school. They have a more practical program and spend a lot of time working on personal issues. This is a worthwhile strategy, but it has to be done in a way which avoids labelling, and it is very resource intensive.

Principals in these schools also recognise the need for a comprehensive pastoral care program, and they recognise the importance of a pastoral care teacher staying with a group of stu-

dents as they move through school. However, the turnover of teachers in most disadvantaged schools is high:

> 'We have a big turnover of staff every year. Some start out really enthusiastic, but they get worn down because of all the problems. I don't blame them. You have to be dedicated to stay in a school like this - and a little crazy'.
>
> 'What about you?'
>
> 'Definitely a little crazy!'

Principals in these schools know that a strong welfare team is essential, and they also recognise the importance of building links with local community services. But, once again, it is a question of resources. One Principal told us: 'If I had three counsellors working full-time and a social worker, then we might be able to make some headway'. The school was receiving additional resources because it was 'disadvantaged', but according to the Principal: 'There is a school nearby which is marginally higher on the index than us, but both schools get about the same amount of extra resources. But it isn't the same! Down there, it's like a bloody holiday camp, compared with us!' Her school recorded 36 homeless students in census week, whereas the other school recorded eight.

The census identified 80 government schools which have high numbers of homeless students (25 or more), and there were 220 schools which had a moderate number (10 to 24). These schools are spread thinly across all states and territories. They have a much more serious problem than an average high school, and they need greater resources to tackle these issues.

Complex needs

Some schools have homeless students with particularly complex needs. One of these groups is homeless refugees. Australia maintains an humanitarian program for refugees who have fled their country of origin. Some are admitted under various United Nations' classifications, but Australia also accepts a significant

number of refugees under our own system of assessment. The initial settlement process is designed to support family groups. Young people aged 18 or under are entitled to English tuition in language centres attached to schools. Most move through the language centres into mainstream schooling. However, schools report that the dropout rate is high, that the initial quota of language teaching is often not enough, and that the population includes some homeless students.

These young people have usually entered Australia without an intact family unit. In some cases, they have been sponsored by a parent who they have not seen for many years. After they arrive in Australia, they find that they have lived apart from them for so long that they are no longer compatible and the relationship breaks down; or they find that the parent has remarried, and they are not welcome in the re-formed family. In other cases, they have been sponsored by someone who claims to be a parent, but is in fact a distant relative, and there is no family unit for them to join. The number of homeless refugees is small, but it is a significant issue in some schools in Melbourne and Sydney. The Deputy Principal of a Catholic school told us:

> At one stage we had about 12 Vietnamese students living in a one bedroom flat. Sometimes they came to school, sometimes they didn't. It was impossible to know what to do. I tried to telephone them ... but they didn't have a phone ... In the end, they all dropped out.

The measures which are needed to support homeless refugees are similar to the measures which are needed to support other homeless students. However, the support worker will require inter-cultural skills of a high order, and sensitivity to the issues associated with the refugee experience. Many schools do not have welfare staff with these skills, and they will need to bring in support staff from ethnic welfare agencies to assist their counsellors. Schools also know that some homeless refugees need on-going

support, because they do not have a viable family unit in Australia.

A second group of homeless young people who have complex needs are Aboriginal youth. Indigenous people live in capital cities, on the outskirts of country towns, and in remote communities in the North and West. Many teachers from remote Aboriginal schools telephoned us during census week. They pointed out that it is common for Aboriginal students in remote communities to move around between the homes of extended kin, and that they would all qualify as 'homeless' using the census definition. However, Aboriginal people do not think of this as 'homelessness', because the extended family has a more important role in these communities; and because Aboriginal people understand 'home' in terms of their traditional relationship to the land, rather than in terms of their relationship to a specific dwelling. Our definition did not reflect this cultural difference. After discussing this with many teachers, we decided to record a nil return for these schools.

The problem of a culturally inappropriate definition did not arise in capital cities or country towns where homelessness is understood in the same way for all students. Aboriginal students were 2.4 per cent of the population in the student needs survey, but 8.4 per cent of homeless students. They are three to four times more at risk of homelessness than other teenagers. However, these young people were spread across 230 schools, and most of them (90 per cent) recorded less than 10 homeless Aboriginal students. There were 20 schools which had higher numbers. Five were in capital cities (Perth, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane). On average, they reported 34 homeless students each of whom 18 were Aboriginal; and 15 schools were in country towns or smaller regional centres (four in Western Australia; two in the Northern Territory; five in Queensland; and four in New South Wales). On average, they recorded 18 homeless students each, including 14 who were Aboriginal.

We visited four schools with high numbers of Aboriginal students, and they resembled other high need schools. They were in poor communities and they were dealing with difficult problems. Two schools had lapsed into fatalism and little seemed to be happening. The other two demonstrated an acute sensitivity to Aboriginal culture, and they were supporting many young people who have complex needs. One school had spent some years building support in the local community and involving Aboriginal parents in the school. There was a priority given to pastoral care, and Aboriginal culture was celebrated in the school, as were the achievements of all their students. This could not counteract the multiple disadvantages of the local community, but the staff were in optimistic mode, and they were doing their best and having some success.

The main policy point is that schools at the 'hard end' of the spectrum will always need greater resources than an average high school. Good policy requires a basic welfare support infrastructure in all schools, and a special needs allocation to the minority of schools which have a high number of homeless students, and to those schools which have groups with complex needs. The States/Territories can be expected to provide a basic welfare infrastructure in all schools, since schools are a State/Territory responsibility. However, there is the need for a supplementary program to ensure that adequate welfare resources are provided in high need schools across the country. This is arguably the Commonwealth's responsibility.

CHAPTER 7

NATIONAL POLICY CHALLENGE

Children and adolescents have always run away. Prior to the twentieth century, boys went to sea, or joined the army; girls fled to the city and went into service ... In Defoe's celebrated novel, Robinson Crusoe leaves his family prematurely, after conflicts with his ageing father, and seeks adventure and independence before the mast. (Crago 1991, p.27)

Young people have always left home because of family conflict. However, in the 1950s and 1960s this did not result in widespread youth homelessness. When Alan Jordan (1994, p.21) interviewed 1,100 homeless men in the mid 1960s, he found that 94 per cent were aged 25 or over, and only two per cent were aged 15 to 19 years. There were homeless young people at this time, but on any night the number was small.

Thirty years later, in the middle of the 1990s, there were 37,000 homeless young people aged 12 to 24 on a typical night, including 21,000 aged 12 to 18 years (Chapter 7). Over a year, approximately 100,000 young people experience homelessness. The first issue is to understand why the problem has increased.[1]

[1] There is an extensive literature about the 'causes' of homelessness. In the Australian literature, see: HREOC 1989; Dwyer 1989; Crago 1991 and 1993; Neil and Fopp 1992; Fopp 1992, 1993 and 1995; Crane and Brannock 1996. In the American literature, see particularly: Hoch and Slayton 1989; Rossi 1989; Wright 1989; Blau 1992; Baum and Burnes 1993; Jencks 1994; and Roleff 1996.

Increasing Problem

When young people left home because of family conflict in the 1950s and 1960s, they usually found a job. This was the era of the 'long boom', when the unemployment rate was no more than one per cent most of the time, and there were 'jobs for everyone' (Groenewegen 1972, pp.91-92). If some of these young people experienced a short period of homelessness, it rarely lasted for long. Once they acquired an income, they moved into shared households or began boarding with other families.

There have been two major changes which largely account for the emergence of youth homelessness as a 'new' social problem. One is the contraction of the youth labour market, and the other is the increase in family breakdown.

Youth labour market

The restructuring of Australia's economy over the past 20 years has resulted in a major contraction in the youth labour market. In the mid 1960s, approximately 70 per cent of young people aged 15 to 19 were full-time participants in the labour force, and only three per cent of these young people were unemployed (ABS, *The Labour Force*, 1964-1966). Thirty years later, the labour force participation rate has fallen to 30 per cent for 15 to 19 year olds, and about 25 per cent of these young men and women are out of work (ABS, *The Labour Force*, 1996-1997). The collapse of the youth labour market has made it necessary for many more young people to complete Year 12, and school retention rates have risen sharply - from about 35 per cent in the late 1970s to just over 70 per cent in the middle 1990s (ABS, *Schools*, 1979-1996). Young people have been inclined to stay at school out of necessity, but Government policies have encouraged this as well.

This has made young people financially dependent on parents for longer, and it has increased the pressure on them to succeed in the education system. It also means that young people who leave

home because of family conflict are unlikely to get full-time employment if they drop out of school. In the 1950s and 1960s most of them avoided homelessness because they got jobs. Now they cannot.

Family breakdown

The second change which accounts for the increase in youth homelessness is a major cultural shift in attitudes towards marriage. There is now a widespread acceptance of divorce as a normal fact of modern life. Following the introduction of 'no fault' divorce in January 1976, the number of divorces has risen from about 10,000 per year in the early 1970s to just over 50,000 per annum in recent times (ABS, *Marriages and Divorces*, 1994-1996). The ABS estimates that approximately two-fifths of marriages now end in divorce, and there are many more single parent households than in the past. Many children and young people experience difficulty with these upheavals in family life, as they attempt to negotiate new relationships with step-parents, de facto partners, and newly acquired 'siblings' (Wallerstein and Kelly 1980; Webber 1994; Cockett and Tripp 1995; Lucas 1996). Growing up has become more difficult for young people, while at the same time they remain financially dependent on parents for longer.

Table 11.1 shows that 70 per cent of all secondary students live with their parents, whereas 30 per cent come from some other family type (divorced, single parent, blended family etc). In contrast, 24 per cent of homeless students came from a family where their parents are still together, whereas 76 per cent came from alternative family settings.[2] Homeless young people come from all family types, but the risk level for young people in alternative families is significantly higher than for young people who come from nuclear families.

[2]Similar figures are reported by Alan Jordan (1995, p.18).

Table 11.1 Family situation of homeless students compared with all students

Family type	Homeless students[1]	Student population[2]
	%	%
Biological parents together	24	70
Other (divorced, blended, single parent etc.)	76	30
	100	100

[1]Source: National census of homeless school students, 1994. Information based on 92 per cent of cases.
[2]Source: Student needs survey, 1996. Information based on 98 per cent of cases.

Table 11.2 shows that the rate of homelessness for young people in nuclear families was 3.4 per 1,000 of the population, whereas it was 25.1 per 1,000 for students in alternative family settings. The risk level for young people in 'blended', divorced, and single parent families is seven times higher than the risk level for teenagers in nuclear families (25.1 per 1,000 compared with 3.4 per 1,000). Thirty years ago 'alternative' family types were a small percentage of the population. These days they amount to about 30 per cent of all families.

Table 11.2 Rate of homelessness per 1,000 school students by family type

Family type	Student population 1994[1]		Homeless students census week 1994		Rate per 1,000 students[2]
Biological parents together	777,000	(70%)	2,640	(24%)	3.4
Other (divorced, blended, single parent etc.)	333,000	(30%)	8,360	(76%)	25.1
	1,110,000		11,000		Ratio = 7.4[3]

[1] Source: ABS (1995) ***Schools Australia***. (Catalogue No.4221.0)
[2] The rate for students with parents together is 2,640/777,000 x 1,000 = 3.4 per 1,000.
The rate for 'other' family types is 8,360/330,000 x 1,000 = 25.1 per 1,000.
[3] The ratio of 7.4 (25.1/3.4) is the comparative likelihood of one group becoming homeless compared to the other.

It is the contraction of the youth labour market, together with changes in marriage patterns, which account for the rise of youth homelessness in the late twentieth century, and both changes appear to be a fairly permanent feature of social life into the foreseeable future. The technological changes of the last two decades mean that young workers have to be more skilled when they enter the labour force, and it is improbable that we will return to a situation where most young people start work at 15 or 16. Similarly, Western Feminism has fundamentally changed the way that men and women view relationships, and it is unlikely that we could go back to the marriage patterns and gender roles of the 1960s. If both of the main changes which underpin the rise of youth homelessness are fairly permanent, then youth homelessness will be a continuing issue well into the 21st century.

Policy Objectives

'Policy objectives' refer to the broad aims of a policy and identify the key principles which should be followed. We have identified four priority objectives which encapsulate the 'policy challenge'.

Avoiding an underclass

As we have seen, homelessness is best understood as a 'career' process, or as a series of transitions from one stage of the experiential process to another. However, the dominant media typification of the problem focuses on young people who are 'street kids'. This is the final stage in the homeless career, after young people have made the transition to chronicity (Chapter 4). At this stage it is more difficult to help them because they no longer express a strong disposition to change their lifestyle. When this happens on a large scale, there emerges a visible underclass of the wandering poor.

This has occurred in the United States in the past 20 years, where it is estimated that there are between 400,000 and 600,000

homeless people on a typical night (Rossi 1989; Wright 1989; Burt and Cohen 1989; Burt 1992; Jencks 1994). In most large American cities, homeless people can be seen in bus and railway stations, public parks and gardens, begging for money on city streets, and sleeping in public places. Joel Blau (1992) has termed them the 'visible poor'.

In 1990 a *New York Times* poll found that 68 per cent of urban Americans see homeless people in the course of their daily routine (cited in Blau,1992, p.1), and nationally the figure was 54 per cent. When the problem develops on this scale, it is very difficult to deal with. According to Baum and Burnes (1993, p.1):

> ... despite all the time, energy, and money spent to address the issue, the United States has come no closer to relieving the misery on the streets or even to having viable ideas about what to do.

A similar problem emerged in Britain in the 1980s, and appears to be just as intractable as in the United States (O'Mahony 1988; Greve 1991; Moore, Canter, Stockley and Drake 1995).

Australia does not have a visible underclass in the same way as Britain or the United States, but youth homelessness is increasing. If large numbers of these young people make the transition to chronicity, then an underclass will emerge during the 21st century. The first policy objective is to avoid the development of an underclass, by developing a national early intervention and prevention policy so that this does not happen.

Schools as sites

Chapter 5 established that most young people have their first experience of homelessness while they are still at school. The national census of homeless school students identified 11,000 homeless school students in census week, and a number of studies indicate that young people are usually 15 or younger when they first become homeless (O'Connor, 1989; Smith, 1995; Crane and

Brannock 1996). Between 25,000 and 30,000 school students probably experience a period of homelessness each year, and five per cent of secondary students are experiencing major conflicts at home (Chapter 6).

A core point is that if young people remain at school and located in their local community, then they are less likely to become deeply involved in the homeless sub-culture. It is only when young people drop out of school and leave behind their local ties, that they tend to make the transition to chronic homelessness. Once this happens, there is no longer an institutional site where they can be reached and the opportunity for early intervention has passed. The second policy objective is to focus on schools as sites for early intervention and prevention.

Coordinated response to a range of issues

Chapter 9 showed that an early intervention strategy requires a strong pastoral care program, well trained counsellors, and effective links between schools and the welfare services available in the local community. However, these are largely the same resources needed to respond to drug abuse, youth suicide and early school leaving.

The increased use of illicit drugs amongst the young is a major concern. There has been a national drugs strategy since the mid 1980s, but the initiatives across the states have been patchy. There seems to have been a substantial increase in activities such as 'chroming', binge drinking, marijuana smoking and, more recently, the use of heroin and amphetamines. A study by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales reports that young people begin experimenting with 'hard' drugs in their teenage years (Darke and Ross 1997), and there were 550 fatal opiate overdoses in Australia in 1995 (Hall and Darke 1997). Substance abuse is a serious problem for a minority of young people, and a concerted attempt to develop

early intervention and prevention strategies has to include schools.

There has been concern about increasing youth suicide which is taken by some as a surrogate measure of youth alienation and social distress (Eckersley 1988, 1992 and 1995). Youth suicide is a relatively small problem in numerical terms, but it is very upsetting when it occurs, and many people feel strongly about this issue. The suicide rate amongst young men increased by 50 per cent between 1979 and 1993, and it is significantly higher for those in the country and for young Aboriginal males. In 1995, 434 young people aged 12 to 24 committed suicide. Of these, 80 per cent were male. Schools have an important role to play in an early intervention and prevention strategy (Victorian Task Force, 1997).

The collapse of the youth labour market since the 1970s has made it more important for young people to complete Year 12. In recent years, governments of both political persuasions have been concerned about youth unemployment, and how to ensure that young people entering the labour force have employable skills. One consequence is that early school leaving (before Year 12) is now seen as a significant social problem. This is a much larger issue for schools than substance abuse, suicide or youth homelessness - because about 30 per cent of young Australians still do not complete Year 12.

It is possible that school retention rates could rise significantly in the next few years - they are now above 90 per cent in some OECD countries (House of Representatives 1996) - but early school leaving is still likely to be seen as a 'problem', because those young people who do not complete Year 12 will be poorly equipped to survive in the labour market. A key component of a strategy to prevent early school leaving must be a strong pastoral care program, which can identify and support students who are at risk.

All of these issues - substance abuse, suicide, youth homeless-

ness, and early school leaving - involve some unique features, and the terms 'early intervention' and 'prevention' differ somewhat depending on which issue is being discussed. Nonetheless, there are some important points of commonality, and welfare staff in schools report that these issues are often interconnected on the ground. At present, they are treated separately and significant amounts of money have been expended on one-off campaigns with little enduring impact. The third policy objective is to put in place permanent welfare arrangements in schools to address these issues in a coordinated way.

National response for a national problem

There are initiatives being tried out in schools and welfare agencies across the country, as local communities attempt to put in place support structures that will help young people face the new challenges that confront them. Much of this work is receiving minimal funding, and it is largely uncoordinated. Some State/Territory governments have taken initiatives, but different governments are doing different things, and some governments are doing very little.

Nonetheless, there are individuals in all states and territories who are attempting to develop alternative programs and strategies. Some are welfare professionals in community agencies, others are public officials in State government departments, some are teachers and principals in schools, and others are unpaid community leaders and concerned parents. Most of this activity is outside the boundaries of conventional party politics. People who want early intervention to happen see it as a 'national issue', rather than a party political one. They are motivated by a widespread belief that all young people deserve a 'fair go', and that teenagers who are encountering difficulties should be 'given a hand'.

The Commonwealth Government has a responsibility to harness this good will in the community, and to provide national

leadership on a national issue. This must involve national standards on the provision of welfare in schools. It is not acceptable for there to be one level of welfare provision in capital cities, and inferior resources in regional centres and country towns. Nor is it acceptable for there to be higher levels of welfare provision in some states, and less effective resources in others. The final policy objective is to develop a national response to a national problem.

What is to be Done?

A national approach to the provision of welfare in schools will need to involve: the State/Territory Education Departments which take primary responsibility for schools; the relevant State/Territory departments which provide welfare and family support services; the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA); and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services.

An appropriate role for the Commonwealth Government is to provide overall national leadership, and for the Commonwealth and the State/Territory Governments to work cooperatively to develop national standards on the provision of welfare in schools. The Commonwealth will be able to facilitate this process if it provides additional funding for those States which meet basic targets, so that they can achieve goals in areas of special need and fund community coordination.

Welfare provision in schools

During fieldwork around the country from 1994 to 1996, we discovered that there is considerable variation in how the school welfare infrastructure is organised in different states. In some states, there are mandatory guidelines for all schools, whereas in others most of the decisions are made at the local level. Also, there is significant variation in the training required for someone to become a school counsellor or welfare coordinator.

In New South Wales, the school counsellors are trained psychologists. They may be responsible for one or two major secondary schools and three or four primary schools. They find it impossible to know most students in their 'base' school, as they spend so much time travelling between schools. Many students do not know who the school counsellor is. One Deputy Principal told us:

> Kids have to have their crisis on a Monday or Tuesday if they want to see the guidance officer in this school. Otherwise they get me ...

School counsellors are professionally trained, but the support system is not sufficiently school based. Most homeless students drop out of school quickly. In 1995, the NSW Governments decided to employ 200 additional counsellors, with about 45 to 50 new counsellors coming on each year. This will help, but a strengthening of the school based provision of student support remains a major issue.

In Tasmania, the school system consists of junior high schools and eight senior secondary colleges. Most homeless students are found in the senior secondary colleges, which also have significant numbers of independent students. The colleges have a full-time counsellor and a Deputy Principal who takes administrative responsibility for welfare. Some have a social worker. Several colleges have adopted a more proactive approach to student support, but this has not been done everywhere. There has been strong official support for change, but the Tasmanian colleges are largely autonomous and improvement has been uneven.

In Queensland, the Department of Education has been shy of taking up the issue of youth homelessness, and the major initiative has come from the Office of Youth Affairs. Most schools have a full-time guidance officer, but this person is primarily responsible for careers education and most have no welfare training. Some are doing an excellent job, but others became

guidance officers some years ago to escape classroom teaching. In Queensland the provision of student support is old-fashioned and in need of a thorough overhaul.

In Victoria and South Australia decisions about the welfare infrastructure are made locally. This should mean that schools can vary the time allocation for welfare to correspond to local needs. In practice, it means that principals who are unsympathetic to disadvantaged students can reduce the time allowance to a token amount. In South Australia, welfare coordination is supposed to be a secure allocation, but this is not always the case. In Victoria, the welfare allocation is solely determined at the school level.

Bryant, McDonald and Smith (1996) found that only nine per cent of Victorian secondary schools had a full-time welfare coordinator in 1996, and just over half (54 per cent) had a half-time position or less. They also found that 41 per cent of social welfare coordinators had no professional training, and this rises to 60 per cent in schools outside of Melbourne. In Victoria, student support is school based, but professional qualifications are not required. Late in 1997, the Victorian Government announced that every secondary school would gain a school counsellor and allocated $8m for 39 positions to coordinate clusters of schools and agencies. This is a major initiative, but local decision-making in schools and regions will determine how effectively this is implemented on the ground.

In Western Australia, most schools have a full-time school counsellor and a full-time youth education officer, who is responsible for work experience, careers advice and takes some role in welfare support. Most schools also have a part-time chaplain and a part-time community police officer. However, the level of welfare provision is not this good in remote communities, or in regional centres outside of Perth.

Despite some promising initiatives, there is a great deal of variation in how student support is provided. Some state govern-

ments are struggling to improve, while others are doing nowhere near enough. There needs to be agreed standards which should apply in all States and Territories. But to reach an agreement on national standards, the Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments will need to undertake a full review of pastoral care and student welfare support services in Australian schools. A review would need to consider:

(1) national standards for determining the ratio of counsellors to students and to schools
(2) national standards regarding the provision of pastoral care in schools
(3) national qualification requirements for welfare staff in schools
(4) guidelines for encouraging a greater partnership between schools and local community services in responding to the problems identified within schools
(5) a formula for allocating additional resources to those schools with special needs
(6) giving primary schools adequate access to counselling and specialist support staff

These proposals are similar to recommendations raised in the House of Representatives Report (1995, p.274).

National standards are required for determining the ratio of school counsellors to students. The Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments should make these decisions cooperatively, bearing in mind that schools require sufficient welfare resources to deal with youth homelessness, substance abuse, suicide and early school leaving.

In devising the welfare allocation, account must also be taken of the minority of schools which deal with the majority of homeless students (Chapter 10). There is a good case for the Commonwealth to provide special needs funding for these schools, which they would receive in addition to funding allocat-

ed through State/Territory budgets. Chapter 10 showed that schools at the 'hard end' of the spectrum need significantly more resources than an average high school to tackle these issues.

Welfare staff in schools should have appropriate training for their responsibilities and be expected to meet national qualification standards, although it will take time to achieve this. An appropriate qualification could be a youth work or social work degree, a degree in psychology or a cognate discipline, a post-graduate diploma in counselling skills, or other welfare degrees or diplomas. There are many people who can become good school counsellors, and entry into the profession should not be restricted to people from one disciplinary background, as is presently the case in New South Wales. There will need to be a transition period for staff to upgrade their qualifications.

Once student support becomes a mainstream issue in schools, then university teacher training courses should include a one semester unit on student support and pastoral skills for all trainee teachers. In the longer term, this would significantly improve the provision of pastoral care in schools generally.

Finally, some basic in-service training for Principals and Deputy Principals will be required as part of a national early intervention and prevention strategy. School administrators play a crucial leadership role in schools and they must understand the policy and be capable of bringing about change in their own schools. Their training should include: how to raise the awareness of teachers and parents about difficult issues; the importance of mainstreaming pastoral care and how to implement it in schools; and how to ensure effective liaison with community agencies and other schools, as the coordination of support services for young people is developed in local communities.

Coordinated service delivery

At the time of writing, the Commonwealth Government pro-

vides services to homeless youth through four departments. The Department of Social Security (DSS) has primary responsibility for the provision of income support, including Young Homeless Allowance and the provision of special benefits for those under 16. The Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) administers Austudy/Abstudy at the Student Homeless Rate (SHR), and is responsible for various labour market programs. The Department of Health and Family Services provides accommodation for homeless teenagers through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), as well as providing health services. Finally, the Attorney-General's Department funds the Adolescent and Family Mediation program as part of the Youth Social Justice Strategy.

However, some of these programs operate in conjunction with the states, which also provide services for homeless teenagers. For example, the Commonwealth and the States jointly formulate the goals for the SAAP program, but the basic administration of the program is delivered through State offices. Similarly, there is overlap between the State and Commonwealth departments in the provision of health services. The States are primarily responsible for child and family welfare services for those under the age of 18. However, the Department of Social Security can provide 'special benefits' to teenagers as young as 13 or 14 years, if they are without family support. The States and Territory Governments are responsible for the provision of education, which means that they have to be the central players in an overall early intervention and prevention strategy. However, the Commonwealth has funded special projects and programs in the past (eg. the Students at Risk [STAR] program and Disadvantaged Schools Program [DSP]) and may have to do so again in the future.

Given this administrative complexity, it is difficult to get a coherent approach to the provision of services for homeless youth. There are four Commonwealth departments involved in

the provision of support, and three or four departments in each State and Territory. Government departments strive to retain budgetary control at all times and do not embrace proposals for coordination which lessen their autonomy.

Every major report on youth homelessness (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989; House of Representatives 1995) has reported that coordination at the government level is poor. The House of Representatives (1995, pp.359-360) concluded:

> The evidence from this Inquiry confirms the view that there is no national youth policy in Australia, merely a series of fragmented Commonwealth and State policies and programs directed towards young people ... These arrangements require a substantial overhaul if there is to be any significant reduction in the number of young people who are becoming homeless and an improvement in the quality of support they receive.

If there is to be a comprehensive national early intervention and prevention strategy, then there needs to be one authoritative Commonwealth department with overall responsibility for this policy. National youth policy cannot happen without the involvement of the States and Territories, since they are also the major providers of youth services. This policy department would oversee the funding of coordination agencies at the community level, because these are essential for early intervention to work. The department needs sufficient authority to coordinate jointly planned and funded initiatives across departments, and to ensure that all departments use consistent criteria regarding the eligibility for benefits and services.

Is Anyone in Charge?

The exercise of national leadership is the Commonwealth's prerogative and responsibility. First, there needs to be sufficient political will to give a priority to youth policy issues. Second, there must be constructive policy ideas in the form of a coordi-

nated national strategy, and third it requires a Government structure for effectively managing the development and implementation of youth policy.

At present, there is no Commonwealth department which takes effective overall responsibility for youth policy. The Youth Bureau within DEETYA is concerned with youth policy. However, the House of Representatives, *Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness*, noted that the Bureau assists in integrating programs associated with the Employment, Education and Training portfolio, but it has no effective authority to coordinate a national policy across different Commonwealth and State/Territory departments (House of Representatives 1995, p.362). The reason why the Youth Bureau cannot provide national leadership on youth policy and effectively coordinate other Government departments is that the Bureau is a sub-section of DEETYA, with insufficient power and authority to take on a national leadership role (Robertson and Beresford 1996).

The House of Representatives Report (1995, p.362) commented that an Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) on Homelessness chaired by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet had been set up to provide policy coordination role in the area of homelessness, but concluded that the IDC: '... has a very narrow focus and does not address the relevant policy issues across the range of portfolio departments which impinge on youth homelessness'.

Since there is no Commonwealth department which takes overall responsibility for youth policy:

> There is no effective coordination and integration of policy or programs at the Commonwealth level. Policy and planning is characterised largely by initiatives of individual departments, often resulting in duplication of services and the lack of consistency in approaches and expected outcomes. (House of Representatives 1995, p.362)

This is not only wasteful, but it creates major practical problems for homeless young people, who require timely support services from a number of different agencies and departments.

The lack of a Commonwealth department with overall responsibility for youth issues will be a major problem for the development of a national early intervention and prevention policy covering substance abuse, suicide, homelessness and early school leaving. An effective strategy has to involve Commonwealth and State/Territory departments working together, because early intervention means: strengthening the welfare infrastructure in schools (the responsibility of State and Territory Governments); coordinating the provision of services in local communities (funded by Commonwealth and State departments); and establishing coordination mechanisms between schools and local services (possibly funded by the Commonwealth, but administered by the States). There has to be an authoritative Governmental structure with overall responsibility for bringing the various Commonwealth and State departments together to achieve this.

Searching for strategies

The role of leadership is to bring together the various Commonwealth and State/Territory departments who are stakeholders in a national early intervention and prevention strategy. Successful policy leadership must ensure that the core theoretical insights underpinning a strategy inform decisions in a practical way. Early intervention is grounded in the understanding that homelessness is a process, and that most young people have their first experience of homelessness while they are still at school. Schools have to be a primary focus for policy, and this means that Commonwealth departments must work cooperatively with State and Territory Education Departments to develop a national early intervention strategy.

One of the first initiatives taken by the incoming Liberal-National Party Government in 1996 was on youth homelessness, with an expressed focus on 'early intervention'. Since there was no governmental structure with overall responsibility for youth policy, a Prime Ministerial Youth Homelessness Taskforce was set up to oversee a large pilot program:

> The Youth Homelessness Pilot Programme signals the Government's intention to increase the service emphasis onto early intervention strategies - that is, before the first key transition, a permanent break from home and family, is reached. This will ... assist family reconciliation through early intervention. (Prime Ministerial Youth Homeless Taskforce 1996, p.10)

The Taskforce report provides a strong official statement about the need for 'early intervention', and 26 pilot projects were funded at a cost of $8 million over two years.

The strategy underpinning the pilot program was to test out how early intervention might be done through community sector projects. The program was a Commonwealth initiative and not a joint venture with the states, and it was administered by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS), not DEETYA. Surprisingly, the 14 member Taskforce included no representatives from any State or Territory Education Department. The decision was made to try out a range of different initiatives. Probably for reasons of expediency, all funding was directed through a Commonwealth department to 26 pilot projects in community based agencies. Most funded agencies had a track record of working with homeless youth, but there were some new projects.

The Youth Homeless Taskforce was committed to early intervention, and the policy brief talked about providing assistance to young people before they have made a 'permanent break from home and family'. For early intervention to work, schools have to be effectively undertaking a broad range of welfare measures

including pastoral care, and to have practices and procedures in place to identify homeless students and those at risk. If a student's homelessness does not come to the attention of the school, or if the school does not make timely and competent referrals, then community agencies are very limited in their ability to provide useful and timely help. It works when schools cooperate, and it fails when they do not.

The Prime Minister's pilot program involves the right policy rhetoric and much may be learned from some of the initiatives which are being undertaken. In the present approach all funding has been directed to the community sector. In conceiving a national program the state education systems and schools need to be more deeply involved. A better model would be to fund community clusters of schools and agencies, which can demonstrate a capacity to coordinate their activities.

National leadership

The House of Representatives (1995) Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness recommended that a Child and Youth Bureau be established within the Attorney General's Department to provide national leadership on youth issues. The proposed Bureau was to be responsible for incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Commonwealth and State/Territory laws. It would then oversee legislative, policy and program initiatives in the area of youth and family policy across the range of relevant departments, with a view determining whether they were compatible with the principles and obligations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Report also recommended that the relevant Commonwealth departments include the percentage of departmental budgets allocated for early intervention and prevention in their annual reports (recommendations 112, 114 and 120).

The proposal for a National Child and Youth Bureau to over-

see youth policy did not attract much support. The concept was difficult to understand, and it seemed excessively legalistic in its reliance on the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child. The idea flowered briefly, but it had no lasting impact.

There are at least two other proposals which could provide a workable mechanism for youth policy. One would be to establish a Commonwealth Department of Youth Affairs, and possibly Education. This would involve the transfer of some functions from other departments into the Youth Affairs portfolio. The new department would need to be given special authority to play a policy leadership role in bringing together State and Territory departments in order to plan a national early intervention and prevention strategy.

An alternative structure would be to establish an Office for the Status of Young People and Children in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, similar to the Office for the Status of Women.[3] The office would have a junior Minister for Youth Affairs assisting the Prime Minister. Its set up would improve the status of youth issues in the Government policy process, and would represent an assurance to the community that the Government is serious about youth issues. Prime Ministerial authority exercised through the Office would ensure that Commonwealth and State/Territory departments work cooperatively to develop a national early intervention and prevention policy across a range of troublesome issues.

National Strategy

An Office for the Status of Young People and Children attached to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet would be responsible for the development a national early intervention and prevention policy. Only a joint Commonwealth and State effort could accomplish a national strategy incorporating homelessness, drug abuse, youth suicide and early school leaving. There are

[3] A similar recommendation has been made by the Australian Law Reform Commission (1997).

three priority issues at the core of any strategy plan.

The first issue is the provision of effective welfare support services in Australian schools. This involves the State and Territory Education Departments, the various State and Territory Departments which provide Family Services, the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services. As we have seen, there is considerable variation in the basic welfare infrastructure which is provided in schools in different states, and there is also marked variation in the qualifications and training of welfare staff. National standards are needed for determining the ratio of counsellors to students and to schools. There should also be national standards regarding the provision of a basic pastoral care program in all schools, and national requirements for the qualifications of welfare staff. There will also need to be criteria to allocate supplementary funds to schools with special needs.

The second issue is to improve the coordination of services at the government level. There are at least four Commonwealth departments which provide community services for young people, as well as three or four departments in each State and Territory. These services cover income support, housing, family welfare, health, legal services and so forth. At present, most departments make their own decisions about what services should be provided and where services should be located. Joint planning is essential to ensure that all communities have a reasonable range of services and that these are located in a rational way. This implies new models for providing coordinated funding for youth issues to communities of agencies and schools. Some agencies are funded by a number of different departments, with each department having its own requirements. Time is wasted and services disrupted when agencies are constantly chasing money and writing tenders.

The third issue is to support coordination in local communi-

ties. Coordination of early intervention activities cannot be an unfunded overhead. A local body, probably a consortium of local schools and agencies, must be funded to coordinate the disparate services in local areas, and to support collaboration between schools and community agencies. This consortium would facilitate planning meetings of all local players, raise public awareness, and provide case management for at risk and homeless youth. There are some projects attempting this model, but for this to become a national initiative, the Commonwealth's involvement is necessary. The Commonwealth should consider funding a national program for community coordination.

In practice, most of the service delivery tasks in the national strategy will be administered by the State and Territory departments, so there will need to be State Government structures with overall responsibility for youth policy coordination in the States. At present, State Governments vary in the priority they give to youth policy and how it is managed. There is a good case for an Office of Youth Affairs within the Department of Premier and Cabinet, for the same reasons as we have advanced for the Commonwealth Office for the Status of Young People and Children.

Leadership challenge

The reforms suggested require leaders from both sides of politics to take a long-range view of youth issues, and to work together in a bi-partisan way. Politicians must understand that the world of young people has fundamentally changed from the 1950s and 1960s when they grew up. Parenting and growing up have never been easy, but in the 1950s and 1960s most young people were raised in nuclear families and few children experienced the trauma of their parents' marriage breaking down. The majority of politicians are from the 'baby boomer' generation who grew up in the years of economic prosperity, when most young people had a choice of what job they would take when they left school. If they

made the wrong choice there were plenty of other jobs that they could move to. Nowadays, 30 per cent of young people have to come to terms with their parents' marriage breaking down, and many young people think that their career options are poor. Substance abuse has also increased over the same period.

All too often commentators and some politicians respond to issues such as substance abuse, homelessness, youth suicide and early school leaving by invoking simplistic explanations about why the world has 'gone downhill'. The rule of thumb is to blame the young person who has the problem, and then to repeat this mantra at every opportunity. Since blame costs nothing, it is easy to spread it around thickly.

The challenge for political leaders is not to play politics with the future of the next generation, and to recognise that early intervention and prevention requires a national approach. There have been major structural and cultural changes in Western countries, and the problems of youth homelessness, suicide, substance abuse and early school leaving are likely to be continuing issues in the 21st century. What is needed is a long-range policy perspective, not driven by the exigencies of the next election. The challenge for the Commonwealth Government (Liberal or Labor) is to develop a national early intervention and prevention policy, and for people from all sides of politics to work with them on this issue. We can make a difference.

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Youth Homelessness

EARLY INTERVENTION & PREVENTION

This book sets down the results of an eight year research journey by David MacKenzie and Chris Chamberlain. They began their work at an inner Melbourne street front agency for homeless youth, and they have since undertaken several landmark studies of youth homelessness. In 1994, they found 11,000 homeless students in Australian schools.

The issue of youth homelessness is examined in the context of relevant social and educational policies. Powerful arguments are raised for an early intervention and prevention approach, and new policy parameters are suggested for schools, community-based agencies and Government.

'One of the main messages of this book is the need for a national approach - policies which will prevent the problem of youth homelessness worsening, assist homeless young people and their families to rebuild their lives, and ensure appropriate and sustainable pathways to participation in the community for all Australians'.

David Eldridge (Salvation Army), Chair of the Prime Minister's Youth Homeless Taskforce and Chair of the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness.

Chris Chamberlain is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Monash University and David MacKenzie is Director of the Centre for Youth Affairs Research & Development at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.

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